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Thinking with Elias about British Independent Funeral Firms

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Abstract

This thesis is about using rather than applying Norbert Elias's conceptual ideas, and its analytical procedure employs a 'fair play' approach to theorists and theory. This is put to use regarding British independent funeral firms by conceiving these as a figuration developing over the long-term, and exploring the accounts of funeral directors placed in dialogue with Elias's ideas. The thesis examines how the key Eliasian concepts of figuration, sociogenesis, habitus and de/civilising processes play out in context, including over-time developments within the British funeral industry. Its focus is 'thinking with Elias' about such matters in relation to the everyday working practices of independent funeral directors.

Chapter One introduces Elias's key conceptual ideas. In beginning its 'fair play' analysis it discusses criticisms, debates and uses of his work and explores the substantive literature on death, funerals and the British funeral industry. Building on this, Chapter Two considers analytically the process of methodologically trying out potential approaches to thinking with Elias around one of his core ideas, figuration. Departing from Elias's retrospective approach, it chases the independent funeral firm figuration as it unfolds in the present. Using figuration in thinking with Elias sets the stage for further analytical use of Eliasian concepts in subsequent chapters. Chapter Three explores how sociogenesis works by examining intersections and departures between the funeral directors' accounts and the Eliasian view of long-term development. Regarding sociogenesis, the 'actual' processes of death-related social change were not of central interest to the funeral directors, who were more concerned with ensuring their firms' persistence. Chapter Four engages with Elias's ideas about habitus and the we-identities of the independent directors, shared belief and behaviour traditions within and between firms and the directors, and also sources of conflict. Core to this is the emphasis on traditions, although these are present-time 'invented' around the priority of remaining in business. Chapter Five presents Elias's

theory of the de/civilising process as his ‘bigger picture’ of social change, and its analysis engages and contrasts this with the independent funeral directors’ accounts of the bigger picture in discussing perceived trends. They respond to changes as these are unfolding, and explain over-time matters of stasis and change as they experience them in ways that challenge Eliasian thinking. Chapter Six discusses the main contributions of the thesis.

In using theory and thinking with Elias rather than against him, I have aimed to be a fair player in doing sociology. First, my thesis recognises the importance of context and that how concepts play out in ‘real’ life will vary significantly. Second, in adopting a fair play approach, the thesis provides a detailed empirical example of how to evaluate theorists on their own terms by following in their suggestions and engaging with their ideas in contextual and reflexive ways. It has neither replicated nor reproduced an Eliasian study, but instead demonstrated how actually using it in a context will play out. Third, the thesis has used the Eliasian key concepts of figuration, sociogenesis, habitus and de/civilising in a present-day setting so as to examine how these unfold in the present and can be explored through people’s accounts. Fourth, it analyses the accounts of the independent funeral directors in a fair play way and establishes that their ideas work as theory, as exploring the dialogue between Elias and the funeral directors has shown. Overall, the thesis is a reply to Elias’s call for sociologists to think for themselves, engage with and expand upon ideas and settings to hand, and to pursue the actual processes at work in society.

Declaration

I declare that I have composed this thesis, and that it contains my own work aside from where otherwise indicated by reference or acknowledgement. This thesis has also not been submitted in any previous form, in whole or in part, for a degree at any other institution or university.

Signed

Emilia P Sereva

April 2017

Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose

Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr
Les Guêpes, 1894


*TO MY FAMILY, however they may change
and however they may stay the same.*

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Acknowledgements

‘This is the way I’ve wanted to keep going
all my life — if I could find a reason for it’.
Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (1943)

To those who encouraged me
To those who discouraged me
To those who challenged me
To those who taught me
To those who calmed me
To those who supported me
To those who listened



Thank you

Special thanks to my advisors, family, colleagues and interviewees.

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Two Notes on Referencing Elias

Throughout this thesis, I have made the decision to reference Elias's work with the original date of publication first. Where a piece has not been published previously, and where editors provide information as to when it was originally written, the date of original writing is included in the place of date of original publication. This is done in order to convey the order in which Elias wrote things, which is important to the arguments made at various points across the chapters. To view a list of referenced Eliasian works, and for further information about referencing and using the Collected Works volumes, please see Appendix I.

Also...

Appearances of 'civilizing' and 'civilising' throughout this thesis reflect my conforming to spelling in cited texts. Although previous translations and some of Elias's own writing in English have used 'civilizing', new translations present in The Collected Works of Norbert Elias (UCD Press) use the term 'civilising', I have used the 's' spelling outside of quotations.

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Chapter One

Thinking with Elias: Fair Play for a Theorist

‘I don’t think I can achieve much on my own... I see something and have put it down on paper as well as I can... How it goes on from there is a matter for later generations’ (Elias 1984b[2013]: 103).

I. Introduction

Bringing funerals and funeral directors together with the theoretical ideas of Norbert Elias in a piece of substantive research? Why and with what reason? Funerals are ritual rites of passage that have been in practice for many centuries and have changed over time, and funeral firms that arrange, direct and transact them likewise have long and intricate histories.¹ As Cooney (2013) puts it, mapping the social treatment of the dead ‘...in itself is a way of marking, re-marking, and remembering the long-term nature of the group’ (Cooney 2013: 19). Death is a constant across the *longue durée* and funerals and by extension funeral firms not only develop around this fact, but also in tandem with shifts and developments in the broader social landscape of change. Sometimes the reductive explanation is given that instead ‘funerals are for the living’. However, there are many overlaps between these views around arranging funerals and the daily work of funeral directors. What has changed? What has stayed

¹ ‘Transaction’ here denotes exchanges between people which are often monetary and transitory.

the same? What broader social implications do any developments have? These are key questions in Elias's process sociology.

As will be discussed in Chapter Two, this thesis is an exercise in using Norbert Elias's ideas, not in applying them. The particular topic is one he alluded to in his discussions of dying (Elias 1979[2010], 1986b[2008]) and his core ideas are relevant to and engage with it, although it was not central in his work. The topic is British independent funeral directors and the funerals they execute, with my main focus centring around how they understand and perceive the industry and their part in it, its 'traditions' and changes over time, and what funerals are and could become. I am investigating this, as I will discuss later, in a way that is unusual for a would-be social theorist. Elias's development of a central theory of society differs from other such sociological approaches in several key respects. He insists on processual views being drawn upon in all social inquiry, he rejects the autonomous individual as 'myth', castigates categories and dichotomies, avoids any approach he deems 'static' and argues for a sociology that can conceive and examine what is really going on. And Elias does this neither from a top-down nor from a bottom-up vantage, but from a standpoint that is at once both and neither. In order to begin conceiving such an approach to sociology it is important to recognise that Elias argues for a revised and re/evaluated understanding of people, groups and social change. Hence it is important to consider why this is of central concern for Elias, and why and how he thinks that present sociological understanding should be questioned and fundamentally reorganised. This thesis is an empirical work also pertaining to sociological theory. The contribution to the latter that the thesis makes is an extended engagement with Elias's ideas by using them.

In conceiving of death, funerals and funeral firms as processual topics, an Eliasian approach is particularly fitting and working in this way leads me to follow Elias in re/thinking some core sociological ideas. In what follows, I first introduce a number of foundational ideas in Elias's approach which will be put to work in later chapters. In making some preliminary remarks about Elias's work, I aim to point up his processual view and related understanding of society as a system interdependently developing in uneven ways along a continuum without beginning. Following this I discuss some main uses and critiques of Elias's work. Then I

introduce the literature pertaining to my substantive area of focus concerning funeral firms, death and debates about sequestration. In closing the chapter, I introduce the central concerns of this thesis and what it aims to do.

II. Nine Foundational Ideas in Eliasian Sociology

i. social processes

Elias argues that society must be conceived in processual terms, as an interweaving of many long-term processes without beginning (Elias 1986b[2009], 1939[2012], 1969[2006], 1970[2012], 1987a[2009]). It is therefore necessary to evaluate any aspect of society as being one anchor-point within a greater series of interrelated processes in medias res. In Elias's view, present-day happenings are influenced in various ways and to varying extents by what preceded them; and thus, inquiries confined to the contemporary or short-term cannot make defensible claims about social change. Elias famously argued that sociologists have 'retreated into the present' and that their attempts to define a universal theory of society in these presentist ways 'increases the risk of failure' (Elias 1987a[2009]: 113). Sociologists must instead focus on the ongoing processes of change which hinge on past and present as interwoven and are generally discernible over the long-term. Elias also warns against conceiving change in terms of 'black-and-white notions' of the 'good past' and 'bad present' because this 'serve[s] little purpose' (Elias 1979[2010]: 14). Instead, he argues it is more important to explore the unfolding ways in which things have become as they are.

Much contemporary sociological work pertains to questions of social change. Here Elias asks, 'change from what?' and argues that the idea of a catalyst for change springing forth from within the bounded present is not only insufficient, but also simplifies questions of complicated over-time developments to reductive and presentist cause-and-effect relationships (Elias 1987a[2009]: 110-11, 1970[2012]: 24-7, 64-5). For him, short-term explanations for contemporary social problems flatten the broad processes of social development into first-this-then-that explanations and reduce them to accounts of 'idiosyncrasies in the struggles of a particular historical period' (Elias 1983[2007]: 81). Elias conversely argues that any

fully adequate examination of change needs to do so by contextually situating it within society in the *longue durée*.

For Elias, the long-term processes of change are neither ‘essentially structureless’, nor neatly structured. Circumventing this dichotomy, Elias argues that social development unfolds in largely unplanned but nonetheless structured ways (Elias 1971[2009]: 14). Thus using static and compartmentalising concepts such as ‘structure’ and ‘function’ undermines the ability to discern social processes by stuffing matters of interest into neatly pre-articulated categories. Elias therefore proposes that studies of social change should instead trace interdependent and shifting temporal relations, and that practitioners should begin by first dismissing the view of things as changing altogether and in a specific direction, from entirely one thing to entirely the next (Elias 1971[2009]: 14). This is because compartmentalising and step-by-step approaches forget that society develops unevenly, and also freeze and reduce the complicated interactions intrinsic to the social order. Elias’s view is that processes of change are neither entirely linear and uni-directional, nor emanate from a zero-point (Elias 1939[2012], 1984[2007], 1987[2010]). Thus a processual focus may provide opportunities for understanding something about what is different now, and why. This is because short-term problems do not rise solely out of the short-term but are the outcomes of complex interweavings of both long-term and short-term influences over time, termed sociogenesis.

ii. sociogenesis

Elias’s concept of sociogenesis aims to cut across static, compartmentalising and short-term approaches to studying social change in proposing instead that some things change and some do not (Elias 1939[2012]: 445, 103, 479). It also conceptualises social development as unplanned but nonetheless structured across time (Elias 1971[2009]: 14), and views contemporary society as a processual continuation of what preceded it (Elias 1971[2009]: 14-16, 1987a[2009]: 110). Elias emphasises that if researchers fail to conceive society as a continuum they run the risk of ‘defeating their own ends’ (Elias 1987a[2009]: 115) and argues throughout his work that any true account of social change must recognise and trace the sociogenetic processes at work over the long term.

Sociogenesis also conceptually downplays the roles of particular people in developmental processes, and instead pertains to many interrelated groups of people and their interactions over time (Elias 1970[2012], 1987a[2009]). For example, social beliefs, behaviours and practices develop through these interwoven interactions within society, which are neither separate from it nor imposed from the 'outside'. As with his views about social change, Elias argues here that beliefs and practices do not simply spring into being and they are certainly not internalised by way of 'forces' acting on people. Rather, Elias contends that beliefs, behaviours and practices develop through ongoing processes of interactions within and between groups in the long-term: they coalesce in and arise through social interactions over time (Elias 1970[2012]: 9-14).

Elias has a problem with the idea of a single processual element being given all the credit for social development and also takes issue with theories of development which are organised in terms of separate spheres. Regarding these two matters specifically, Elias disagrees with Marx. In Elias's view Marx is wrongly preoccupied with the notion of a dominant economic sphere as the central amalgamating factor in society, and he disagrees with Marx and Engels' argument that individuals are above all mediated by economic aspects (Marx 1992/1876, 1994; Marx and Engels 1978, 1998/1932). Elias points out that in spite of being superficially contested by Engels, 'in his and Marx's view the "economic movement" basically determines all the others' (Elias 1971[2009]: 6) in conceiving society as a long-term succession of separate spheres of economic circumstances.

With Elias, I would propose that there is no singular driving force behind or in society. In any present situation there are complex combinations of elusive, obvious and unforeseen contributions from many earlier periods occurring in figurational ways. That being said, any research project requires a focus. Regarding Elias's detailed and wide-ranging studies, he usually focused on one or several particular aspects and described their over-time development in terms of the broad processes at work in society. Given this, it may be concluded that research into any specific element must perceive its development in terms of being inexorably bound up in an interdependent, interconnected and developing amalgamation of broader processes over time.

iii. the figuration

For Elias, the autonomous individual is a myth as people are instead bound together through ‘webs of chains’ of relationships (Elias 1969[2006]) which emerge, coalesce and disintegrate over the course of time in accordance with shifts in their membership. This is why Elias proposes that social research should be structured in ways which hinge upon this interpersonal interdependence. He relatedly argues that social researchers should be concerned with exploring the patterns they help to construct through their ongoing interactions with others, as well as the manner in which they are bound up with other related people (Elias 1983[2007]: 79). These interdependent webs of chains of interacting people are dubbed ‘figurations’, which are social structures comprising unplanned but structured groups of people linked through mutual membership of a particular kind (Elias 1986a[2009], 1970[2012]: 7-27). Elias argues that people will always group together to form particular figurations (Elias 1986a[2009]: 1, 1983[2007]) and he indicates that figurations can be as small as mother-daughter or as large as a nation (Elias 1986a[2009]: 2, 1970[2012]). Larger figurations are frequently composed of many simpler ones, but with the whole being more than or different from the sum of its parts (Elias 1987[2010]: 13).

Conceptually, figurations differ from other terminologies denoting groups because, although they are composed of people and do not exist independently of people, they do not centre on them as individuals (Elias 1970[2012]: 66-7). The conceptual focus of figuration begins at the level of groups, as they require two or more people to be designated as such. And it is important to note that despite individuals not being the focus, any incoming members will have some effect on the figuration because, for the duration of their presence, they become in some ways interrelated with existing members (Elias 1983[2007]: 79-80). Likewise, social researchers cannot perceive the figurations they research independently of their own relationships with them, and they will always alter the figurational framework in spite of efforts to avoid ‘researcher effects’.

People are generally members of several figurations (for example, family and nation). Figurations grow, diminish and change form in accordance with members’ interactions and lifespans. Although at any given point figurations are constituted by interdependent people, their existence can transcend the involvement of particular

members: one person leaving a figuration does not generally cause its disbanding. That being said, figurations can be short-term as well, particularly in situations where a group of people converge for a specific short-term purpose – like arranging a funeral.

Elias comments that, over time, ‘The network of human activities tends to become increasingly complex, far-flung and closely knit... No one is in charge. No one stands outside. Some want to go this, others that’ way (Elias 1983[2007]: 77). And as with interdependent people, figurations are also interdependently bound together. Figurations can merge with other figurations or change in shape and composition to reflect varying membership over time. Elias notes that such developments occur often enough that figurations and the people constituting them develop interdependently along the continuum of long-term processes, with this development being both the outcome and the source of interpersonal interaction. People comprise figurations, and figurations delineate groups of people because they develop interdependently in accordance with their relationships and interactions over time.

iv. un/intended actions and consequences

Regarding social dynamics within figurations, Elias argues that ‘unintentional human interdependencies lie at the root of every intentional interaction’ (Elias 1970[2012]: 90). And although societies are composed of people who think of themselves as individuals acting intentionally, the outcomes of the combined human interactions are most often unplanned and unintended (Elias 1970[2012]: 141-2, 1987a[2009]: 109-10). This view challenges concepts like individualism and agency which suggest that persons, through their actions, plan and steer their own lives. This then translates to the further assumption that society is the combined outcome of these intended individual plans. However, Elias would remind us that because people are interconnected in and through figurations, one person’s actions are bound together with, influenced and impacted by the actions of other people and that together these groupings of intended actions will interact to produce unforeseen outcomes. (Elias 1970[2012]: 141-2). In other words, what people plan and execute will manifest in

unforeseeable and unintended ways because they cannot also plan the related re/actions of others.

v. habitus

Figurations develop over time and come to embody unique sets of in-group beliefs and behaviours, which Elias denotes as a shared habitus. Habitus can be understood as the glue holding figurations together over the long term. Conceptually it refers to a shared set of assumptions and thinking that are ‘second nature’ or ‘embodied social learning’, which comes into use through interpersonal interaction over the long term and may outlast any one phase in a figuration’s lifespan (Elias 1939[2012]; Dunning and Mennell 1996: ix). While sociologists may first think of Bourdieu in connection with habitus, Dunning and Mennell note in their preface to *The Germans* (1996) and ‘Notes on the Text’ for *Studies on the Germans* (2013) that Elias’s use of the term long predates Bourdieu’s popularisation,² and that ‘habitus’ was widely used in German sociology during the period between the First and Second World Wars (Dunning and Mennell 1996: ix, 438, 2013: xxiii).

From an Eliasian perspective, long-term processes over the course of a particular figuration’s sociogenesis are integral in the development of its habitus. This perspective on habitus promotes a view of things changing unevenly and gradually, with the past as foundational. For Elias, habitus is thereby a gradually changing ‘second nature’ composed of the ‘sedimented’ layers of the past’s related figural beliefs and practices (Dunning and Mennell 1996: ix; Elias 1989a[2013]: 24). Moreover, habitus is key to understanding the beliefs and behaviours of any figuration, whether as large as a nation or as small as a friendship-group; and this is another sense in which habitus is layered and accumulating. But habitus also proliferates, with an increasing array of both similarities and differences developing within and between groups. Elias argues that, over time, there are ‘diminishing

²Although when writing in English Elias used terms like ‘belief and behaviour tradition’ until later in his life, he used the term ‘habitus’ throughout his German publications. Prior to the mid-1980s, English translations of Elias’s German works transmuted ‘habitus’ to ‘personal makeup’ and similar phrases, since until its popularisation by Bourdieu habitus was an unfamiliar term in English (Mennell 2014: x). A further discussion of this can be found in Chapter Four.

contrasts and increasing varieties' in society, pertaining to the ways that figurations shape social development in the long-term (Elias 1939[2012]: 422-7). A simple way of explaining this is that, although at present there are an increasing number of car manufacturers and many thousands of models, basically the different models are all highly similar.

In following the sociogenesis of a particular figuration or figurations, it is relatively easy to point to broad and overarching sorts of influences – including laws, wars, changes in government, reorganisations of community structures, economic formations and their regulations – as intrinsic to long-term development. However, things do not altogether change and often do not develop in perceptible or foreseeable ways. Elias relatedly argues that 'Civilization is not "reasonable"; not "rational", any more than it is "irrational". It is set in motion blindly and kept in motion by the autonomous dynamics of a web of relationships by specific changes in the way people are bound to live together' (Elias 1939[2012]: 405). As such, although overarching influences do have their ingrained effects, the ways in which people come to understand what is going on around them are chiefly shaped by their shared habitus. Habitus is what guides and shapes their development as a group, and the group's development also shapes and changes its habitus.

vi. established–outsider relationships

It should not be assumed that figurations when brought into contact with one another will coalesce amicably and without conflict. Because every figuration is characterised by a unique and differentiated habitus, and because power and dominance cannot be shared by all, problems arise when figurations intermingle in confined quarters (Elias and Scotson 1965[2008]). These problems pertain to ratios of power, clashing habituses and associated matters of 'right' and 'wrong', manners and struggles for dominance. Established–outsider relationships are best understood when considering two groups merging. Where one group (the established) has held power over a certain space or institutional setting, but where a new group (the outsiders) enters and threatens to shift the balance of power or else influence prevailing and pre-existing beliefs and behaviours, the former is likely to attempt to preserve the status quo through practices of exclusion. The most focused account of

established–outsider relationships is developed in Elias and Scotson’s (1965[2008]) study of the same name, but key ideas about this are not confined to Elias’s study of local community and neighbourhood dynamics. Broadly speaking, established–outsiders brings into focus the interplay between habitus and power and the effects this interplay may have on the long-term development of figurations in these situations. Another example of this can be found in Elias’s ideas about diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties, discussed later in the thesis.

vii. dichotomies

Elias (1983[2007]) argues that, whilst people interpret things around them in terms of opposing categories and either/or relationships, things cannot actually be reduced like this (Elias 1983[2007], 1971[2009]). Although people may feel compelled to present actions in opposing terms, society does not work that way. Elias points out that, if social interactions were truly reducible to extreme dichotomies, life would be completely different from how it is (Elias 1983[2007]: 68-70). Despite presentation in terms of an ‘unbridgeable divide between two entities’, supposed dichotomies are actually interdependent and rely on each other for balance (Elias 1983[2007]: 68-9, 69n). Elias himself endeavours to destroy rather than ‘dissolve’ or ‘resolve’ such oppositions (as van Daalen and Kuipers (2013) suggest). This is because he thinks dichotomies of this kind are myths, and understands them as never having really existed in the first place (Elias 1970[2012], 1987[2010], 1989[2011], 1984a[2013]).

As an example, Elias reminds his readers of the false separation between ‘individual’ and ‘society’, which is untrue because these are really two sides of the same coin (Elias 1987[2010]: 9). Society is made up of interdependent groups of interdependent people and these groups of people together compose ‘society’: individual-and-society. Evidencing this, Elias suggests it is impossible to extract persons from the groups and relationships comprising a society, nor to isolate ‘society’ from the groups of people comprising it (Elias 1983[2007]: 99, 1987[2010]: 139-40; Mennell 1977: 100). Elias’s use of the term ‘homo clausus’ (meaning ‘closed person’), as with his concept of figuration, emphasises the impossibility of separating specific people from society and from other related things and people (Elias 1989[2011]: 35n). Relatedly, individual-and-society should be understood as

more than a part-whole relationship and with reference to what Elias calls the ‘homines aperti’ (meaning ‘open people’) (Elias 1983[2007]: 101-2). Elias argues that people can only be understood through their interactions and interdependencies with one another, and people’s psyches are socially shaped through interactions with those with whom they are connected (Elias 1987[2010]: 58-9). Thus, ‘identity’ is developed through the process of being-in-the-world and of interacting with others in a range of capacities (Elias 1939[2012]; Beauvoir 2000/1947).

Accordingly, it is misguided to approach ‘individual’ and ‘society’ as separate entities. Elias argues that, ‘Instead of speaking of people acting to develop societies, we have to speak more impersonally of the process of development’ (Elias 1970[2012]: 142). This is because arguments wherein individuals ‘make’ society or society ‘makes’ individuals imply agentic qualities, assume a lack of reciprocity between the two and also assume that there will be an eventual finished product (Elias 1987[2010]). All persons are bound up within groups of interrelated and interdependent people in their own society and also regarding the long-term processes involved. Elias also notes how related discussions about conflict or tension between them reinforce ‘an aura of valuations which obscures rather than illuminates what they are meant to express’ (Elias 1987[2010]: 15).

The supposed individual/society dichotomy also appears through usage of the words ‘we’ and ‘I’, which mis/leads people to understand ‘we’ as a collection of autonomous individual ‘I’s. The increasing importance of a person’s ‘I-identity’ can be compared back to a time in history when there was no sense of ‘individual’ (Elias 1987[2010]: 140-1; Wouters 2011, 2002). However, as society became increasingly concerned with the I-specific individual, it also became more difficult to understand the ‘we-society’ as anything but a collection of individuals. However, ‘I’ is necessarily we-reliant and vice versa. To understand the self as ‘I’ necessarily incorporates a whole range of interconnected people together within an ever-changing swarm of interrelated re/actions over time (Elias 1987[2010]: 139-45;

Beauvoir 2000/1947). And this is why Elias suggests people should instead think in terms of We-I,³ as an interdependent balance.

viii. destroyers of myths

Elias proposes that researchers must endeavour to ‘break through the veil of mythologies drawn over our image of society’ (Elias 1984b[2013]: 102, 105, 1987[2010], 1979[2010]). For him, a myth is an ideological view of society, an idealised ‘wish-dream’ or a falsehood (Elias 1984b[2013]: 102-5). For Elias, such myths must be eradicated because they adversely affect the aims and methods of social inquiry. Myths are both attractive and problematic, foremost because they reproduce an unrealistic view of society by perpetuating prevailing ideas of what people want to see, rather than unravelling and questioning the actual unfolding processes at work in society. Elias views many aspects of society including politics and the news as imbued with ‘wishful dreams, wish fulfilments and stigmatisations’ (Elias 1984b[2013]: 102).

Elias endeavours to destroy myths by plotting out his central theory of society and developing his own process sociological approach, which he hoped later generations would take up, use and develop (Elias 1984b[2013]: 103, 1986b[2008]: 266). And he believed that, until sociologists realise the truth and usefulness of such ideas, myths would continue to be rampant and misleading. For Elias, destroying myths involves recognising the truth in the main facets of his process sociological view: that society is a series of interwoven processes without beginning, is composed of interdependent groups of people, and that social developments rise out of these interdependent actions and can be discerned by undertaking a long-term view.

³ Although the current prevailing terminology used in discussing Elias’s views on interpersonal interdependence has been termed ‘We-I’ [see the Collected Works editions (Elias 1987[2010], 1983[2007], 1970[2012])], earlier English variations include ‘I-We’ (Elias 1991: 184, 204, 209; Scheff 2001: 102-3; Kemple 2001: 137; Dunning and Hughes 2013: 59) and ‘I-and-we’ (Elias 1970[1978]: 136-8).

ix. de/civilising

People's habituses and accordingly their manners, beliefs and behaviours do not simply change altogether from one state to the next. Rather than thinking of change in clunky first-this-then-that terms, Elias argues that the gradually developing differences within and between groups are a locus for understanding why and how behaviours and practices come to be understood as 'more' or 'less' proper at different phases within a specific society's development (Elias 1939[2012], 1969[2006], 1950[2007]; Elias and Scotson 1965[2008]). Putting these ideas to work, several of his earlier writings (Elias 1939[2012], 1969[2006], 1935[2006]) explore processes of de/civilising through the example of manners, demonstrating that these are developing sets of behaviours and beliefs that arise out of figural interactions and a long history of interrelated shifts and trends. In a letter to Walter Benjamin, Elias (1938) explains that an underlying motive for his *On the Process of Civilisation* (1939[2012]) was 'to find a clear method and unambiguous material which would overcome the hitherto dominant static conception of psychical phenomena' (Elias 1938: 1; see also discussion of this correspondence in Schöttker 1998). By 'psychical phenomena', Elias is alluding to his conviction that developments in people's internalised thinking and beliefs are interdependently related with developing social norms in a particular society and at a particular stage. In the instance of manners, this relationship describes how internalised beliefs about proper ways of socialising and comporting oneself influence and are influenced by established ideas about 'good manners'. These conceptions of 'proper' proliferate, spreading 'outward' from groups in power, forming new ideas in the long-term and reinforcing prevailing ones in the short-term (Elias 1939[2012], 1969[2006]).

It should also be emphasised here that de/civilising processes do not delineate progress, modernisation or evolution and that Elias does not at any point suggest that one group is 'more' or 'less' civilised than another. Just as society has no beginning, so too processes of de/civilising are never finished but continue in tandem with the gradually developing figurations in a society. In other words, although people in different societies at different points in time will have some shared ideas about what are to them 'civilised' behaviours, a society is never completely civilised or done with the process of civilising. While Elias (1939[2012]) does, for example, discuss

de/civilising processes in France, England and Germany, these are not used for comparative purposes but to provide a range of detailed evidence pertaining to different ways in which de/civilising processes play out in accordance with the group-dynamics and developmental differences characterising each case. This is because for Elias studies of de/civilising are only to be taken on a case-by-case basis and not in terms of [group A] being more civilised than [group B]. Rather the theory of the de/civilising process concerns an attention to how things proliferate in a given society in tandem with other greater and smaller processes at work. Moreover, there are trends which are largely to be seen as ‘decivilising’ or ‘civilising’ and also trends which enact no discernible social change in behaviours, beliefs and practices (Elias 1939[2012]). Also Elias is not satisfied with the word ‘direction’, although there are no better terms at present, and the de/civilising process continues in a multidirectional fashion with general trends being the most visible and decipherable across lengthy periods of time (Elias 1939[2012]: 505-9).

Particularly in his studies of developing manners, Elias (1939[2012], 1969[2006]) emphasises that, until we recognise that present-day social life and personality structures are the outcomes of long-term processual interplays, we will ‘remain in the dark as interpreter, as hermeneutic historian of the past’ (Elias 1979[2010]: 18). De/civilising processes are not solely about the state or national levels. In an essay on what he terms ‘technisation’, Elias demonstrates how over the course of history people have harnessed ‘lifeless material’ in pursuit of ‘better lives’ (Elias 1995[2008]). This process enmeshes with his ideas about de/civilising and delineates that current ideas of what is ‘better’ build on previous ones. As noted earlier, theorising change as first-this-then-that steps removes from sight what are actually gradual, uneven and unfolding developments. For instance, an invention, although etymologically suggesting something entirely new, is really an outcome of many interwoven processes over time. Ideas about de/civilising and other social processes span recorded and remembered history with no zero-point (Elias 1987[2010]: 30, 1984[2007]:119). Thus, social development is a collection of non-unilinear processes comprising a myriad of groups interacting and developing in various ‘directions’ and with differing rates of development over time (Elias 1983[2007]: 76, 1977[2009]: 9).

III. Critiques and Uses of Elias's Work

I have introduced key interconnected facets of Elias's process sociology, and these will be put to use later in this thesis. It is useful now to explore some of the critiques and substantive uses of his work. Although Elias spent many years in England and published several papers in English-language journals, much of his earlier writing has only fairly recently been translated from its original German. Thanks in large part to the editors and translators of the eighteen-volume *Collected Works of Norbert Elias*,⁴ Elias's complete writings are now available in clear and precise English translation. Some of Elias's most famous work, such as *On the Process of Civilisation* (1939[2012]), *The Society of Individuals* (1987[2010]) and *What is Sociology?* (1970[2012]) have been translated into many other languages including Spanish, French, Greek and Italian. As such, contemporary readers the world over now have the opportunity not only to grasp the breadth and depth of Elias's intellectual concerns, but also to realise the epistemological continuities binding his work together.

To those critics who are not familiar with Elias's body of work and particularly his processual and interdependent view of social organisation, the topics and arguments he used may appear discordant because they focus on specific components. In fact, as Mennell (1987b; Liston and Mennell 2009), Dunning (1989, 2002) and Kilminster (2014, 2015) demonstrate, many critiques of Elias's works collapse when one consults his other publications. There is a problem in social theory wherein critics often read only one or two of a theorist's works, but make broad claims about the whole. Critiques are seemingly constructed by extracting and criticising one thing, rather than reading all that a theorist has written on a subject or putting the scrutinised concepts to work in some way. In reality Elias's various works harmonise and co-construct a decisive and cohesive set of ideas, and I will return to this in later chapters. For example, Elias is particularly interested in group dynamics and uses his ideas about established-outsider relationships and figurations to explore how these work in studies of sport (Elias and Dunning 1986[2008]), court societies (Elias 1969[2006], 1939[2012]), the British navy (2007a), neighbourhood

⁴ See references and Appendix I for further information on the *Collected Works* volumes.

exclusion and gossip (Elias and Scotson 1965[2008]), power relations (1990a[2008]), pigeon-racing hobbyists (Elias and Dunning late-1960s[2009]) and relationships between women and men in ancient Rome (Elias 1987c[2009]). To further develop his central ideas about the sociogenesis of de/civilising processes, Elias explores how they work in the development of art (1984b[2013], 1970[2009], 1975[2009]), manners and customs (1939[2012], 1969[2006]), knowledge construction in academic disciplines (1972[2009]), state formation (1989a[2013], 1939[2012]), technologies (1995[2008]) and professions (2007a). Elias also considers the developmental and interdependent qualities of knowledge (1971[2009]), consciousness (1973[2009]), time (1984[2007]), language (1971[2009], 1977[2009]), emotions (1987b[2009]) and dying (1979[2010], 1986b[2008]). Despite pertaining to specific topics, using detailed evidence and making nuanced arguments, all of these studies rest upon a set of core ideas which Elias developed over the course of his professional life.

Above all, Elias is interested in ‘discovering’ social reality. By this he means investigating society unobscured by myths and ideologies (Elias 1984b[2013]: 104-5). Throughout his many books and articles, Elias puts into practice the belief that to understand how ‘real society’ works, sociologists must approach particular topics as long-term social processes of un/planned interactions within and between figurations of people. Indeed, Mennell suggests that Elias’s theories grew from the constant interplay between theoretical contemplation and empirical investigation (Mennell 2003: 182). Thus, although the topics of Elias’s inquiry may range from a social experiment about tying his shoelace (1967[2009]) to the formation of the German state, to feelings of freedom in pigeon racing hobbyists, to human dying, they are best viewed as case studies concerned with how particular figurations undergo processes of de/civilising over the course of their sociogenesis. This topical diversity helps to underscore the cohesive epistemological basis of Elias’s understanding of society-as-process.

Anderson, Hughes and Sharrock suggest that sociology resembles philosophy more than the other social science disciplines because it is an ‘argument subject’ rather than a ‘knowledge subject’ (Anderson et al. 1985: 51). This is because, like philosophy, sociology has devoted great efforts to unravelling complex questions

throughout the course of its disciplinary history. A rider can be added here: as Smith (1974) has argued, sociology has perhaps lost its way by frequently treating theories and arguments as facts. But there can be more than one feasible answer to any sociological question and these form the basis of ongoing arguments running through its disciplinary history. Sociologists sometimes seem to forget this in claiming their arguments are correct and all others incorrect; and this is to forget that ideas accumulate and build upon what came before. The central questions persist over time, but social as well as disciplinary developments gradually act to re-contextualise them. And while a contemporary argument may be perceived as ‘true’ in the short-term, this neither overwrites the previously ‘true’ arguments, nor provides arguments that will necessarily prevail as ‘true’ in the *longue durée*. Further, theorists change their minds and also readers may interpret their theories in different ways, so that ideas, approaches and truth-claims will seem correct to particular groups in the context of particular stages in social and disciplinary development but not at others, nor for everyone. One result is that sociologists may place greater emphasis on contemporary answers, while misinterpreting and thus underestimating the ideas and propositions of their predecessors (Anderson et al. 1985: 70). This exemplifies Elias’s argument about sociologists ‘retreating’ into the present (Elias 1987a[2009]) wherein older and half-forgotten theories are often rebranded as if recent discoveries (Anderson et al. 1985: 70).

What Anderson, Hughes and Sharrock call ‘fair play for theorists’ presents a rubric for evaluating theories on their own terms, rather than comparing theories by using opposing frameworks or alternative notions of theory (Anderson et al. 1985: 51). Because understandings of ‘reality’ vary between groups and have developed over time within those groups, evaluations based on stage-specific and conflicting in-group perceptions of ‘reality’ will not be very useful to anybody. As such, fully understanding a theory requires readers to conceive its key points on its own terms, appreciate the context in which it was originally posed and consider how the theory has been used over time.

According to this, Elias both is and is not a ‘fair player’. Elias is noted for sparse referencing (Loyal and Quilley 2004: 4-5) and the majority of his core arguments do not seem to hinge on the works of particular predecessors (van Krieken

1998: 40; Maso 1995; Goudsblom 1987a, 1994). On the other hand, Elias compares the few theories he directly references with his ‘more realistic’ and process-oriented view of society, as with his evaluation of Talcott Parsons’ work as being ‘static’ (Elias 1968[2012]: 513-16; Goudsblom 1994: 2-3). Further his account of Marx and Engels’ work, mentioned earlier, criticises them for being too focused on ‘the economic sphere’ (Elias 1971[2009]: 4-13). Instead of static categories of ‘success’ and ‘failure’, ongoing debates would benefit from questioning why a theory is considered correct at a particular stage in development for certain groups but not others. My reading of Elias suggests he ultimately did do something very like this. For example, in weighing Marx and Engels’ ideas, he reminds readers that emphasis on all things economic is characteristic of that particular era, given the rapid growth of industrialisation and factory-based labour at the time (Elias 1971[2009]: 4-12).

Sociology’s argument-based disposition is not necessarily problematic, but becomes so when disagreements are unproductive in the sense of not adding anything. Likewise, attempts to smite established theories in order to impose a new orthodoxy undermine sociology as an ‘argument subject’ because not allowing for a range of workable theories about the same social phenomena. In practice, people wishing to create something ‘new’ must necessarily learn from and build upon what already exists. While Elias’s work and his development of process sociology presents a very different approach to previous prevailing ideas, its main points are developed in reference to and contrast with previous theories he deemed problematic. Elias’s insistence on a processual view also provides valuable additions and insights to many ongoing debates by presenting a new means of understanding these. Further, the broad scope of his writing demonstrates potential for wide-ranging usage in many disciplines. In other words, Elias’s work provides productive disagreements including with quite a few more ongoing debates than he may have intended.

The ‘fair play’ rubric argues that readers should thoroughly make sense of a theory, and proposes that whether a theory makes sense often depends on readers’ efforts toward understanding it (Anderson et al. 1985: 58). As such, readers will benefit from reading fairly and assuming that perceived issues in what they are reading may have a sensible and rational basis, rather than being ‘the result of mere error’ (Anderson et al. 1985: 55). However, while Elias is not overall an ‘unfair

player' a number of his critics certainly are. Menell notes that critics commonly misunderstanding Elias's work as being a kind of Victorian progress theory (Menell 1990b: 163). For example, Giddens has characterised Elias's approach as 'largely submerged in a generalized evolutionism' (Giddens 1986: 241). More specifically, critics have attacked Elias's work on the grounds of being an exercise in 'non-comparative eurocentrism' (Goody 2003: 71), for using outdated models in attempting to transcend outdated models of social inquiry (Aya 1978; Layder 1986), for failing to deliver on his promises of a purer methodology (Rojek 1986; Aya 1978; Layder 1986; Rojek and Turner 2000) and for his uses of evidence (Duerr 1988, 1994, 1995, 1997, 2002; Goody 2002).

Layder argues that Elias overestimates the scope, merits and explanatory abilities of his process sociological approach and that he fails to transcend the epistemological concerns he claims to have overcome (Layder 1986: 367-8). Had they been substantiated, these claims might have been helpful in contributing to ongoing Eliasian debate. Layder's (1986) critique is however in violation of the 'fair play' rubric (Anderson et al. 1985) for several main reasons. First, Layder's (1986) critique of Elias uses negativistic language, especially in describing Elias's rather even-handed arguments against established methodology as a 'diatribe', 'inability', 'inflated', 'exaggerated', 'disparaging' and 'naïve'. This aggressive language suggests perhaps that Layder may have oriented his critique by presenting Elias's theories in a binary relationship with his own ('truer') version, thus missing many key points. Second, although he discusses Elias's concept of figuration and other core ideas, and while his focus is on the workability of the concepts themselves, Layder's (1986) counter-arguments do not exactly evaluate Elias's ideas on their own terms. Perhaps because Layder's (1997, 2004, 2009) work largely pertains to the structure-agency debate rather than the Eliasian processual view, his critique seems focused on discrediting Elias through proving he misunderstands the epistemological approaches that process sociology draws distance from, thus asserting the dominance of Layder's own views. For example, Layder argues that 'the concept of figuration does not reify social reality because like the game, it has "no existence independently of the players"' (Layder 1986: 371). For Elias, the figuration makes social reality real because it cannot exist without people to

construct, comprise and interpret it. In this instance, Layder seems to impose his own belief that social reality must exist separately from the interactions of people.

However in a somewhat surprising turn, Layder (2006) has also highlighted the merits of process sociology and given respectful attention to Elias's key ideas in one of his later books. Perhaps he came to perceive some merits of Elias's ideas later, and this is an example of theorists changing their minds.

Using a different basis of assessment, Hans Peter Duerr has published a five-volume critique of Elias's *On the Process of Civilisation*, called *Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß* [*The Myth of the Civilising Process*] (1988, 1994, 1995, 1997, 2002), which is currently not available in English translation. As my understanding of written German is rather basic, I need to rely here on an expert account by Mennell and Goudsblom (1997), and also some supplementary writing on it by Goudsblom (1994) and van Krieken (1998) in considering Duerr's critique. Duerr focuses his critique on Elias's factual examples, presenting exceptions to these. Mennell and Goudsblom (1997) conclude about this that Duerr's 'lepidoptery' of contradicting facts is related to his particular stance, as he rejects a long-term processual view of society's development. In other words, Duerr has missed the point in proposing that the theory of the de/civilising process is a myth (Mennell and Goudsblom 1997: 730). Duerr's criticisms rely on cherry-picked factual accounts to demonstrate such exceptions, but in doing so they do not and cannot undermine the broader ideas Elias put forth (Mennell and Goudsblom 1997). Duerr fixates on criticising particular examples that Elias used, but of course there will usually be exceptions to the rule.

Goody's critiques (2002, 2003, 2006) are also rife with 'fair play' violations, in particular by recasting Elias as a sheltered eurocentrist. Like Duerr, Goody first criticises Elias for 'arbitrarily' selecting certain aspects for his analysis, particularly with regard to his analysis of manners in civilising processes (Goody 2002: 401). Who decides what is arbitrary? He also accuses Elias of being 'the very opposite of an ethnographer' in his treatment of Ghanaian society as a 'primitive' one which has 'not yet undergone the civilizing process' (Goody 2002: 402, 2003, 2006). As Elias repeatedly argues and demonstrates throughout his work that de/civilising processes are ongoing and unique for each society (Elias 1939[2012], 1970[2012], 1969[2006],

1984[2009]), such statements call into question whether Goody made an effort to understand the theory of the de/civilising process or simply harboured dislike for Elias and for sociology dating from when the two became acquainted in Ghana (1962-64).

Based on Elias's (1975[2009], 1970[2009]) comparative studies of de/civilising processes involved in Ghanaian and European culture, art and social organisation, as well as his use of the term 'naturvolk' and his interview comments about life in Ghana (Elias 1984b[2013]), Goody also attempts to dismiss Elias as an old fashioned racist (Goody 2002: 402, 2003: 64, 2006: 156). This assertion suggests an unfair interpretation of Elias. My reading of Elias's accounts suggests that he understood Ghanaian society as undergoing a different de/civilising process, comprised of different interwoven processes that could not be adequately compared with European ones (Elias 1984b[2013]: 130-4, 1970[2009], 1975[2009]). To Elias it is never a question of 'othering' (Goody 2002: 402), but rather of social interconnectedness and ongoing long-term processes (Elias 1970[2009], 1975[2009]). Specifically regarding Goody's implied anthropological ownership of ethnography, Elias is more sophisticated than many in acknowledging that his presence altered what occurred around him and what he could witness while in Ghana. He immersed himself in local ongoing, learned about Ghanaian life through discussions with his students and neighbours and took a particular interest in traditional art (Elias 1984b[2013]: 134, 1970[2009], 1975[2009]). The critique Goody makes seems actually to pertain to a larger boundary dispute between anthropology and sociology in the 1960s when they met in Ghana (Liston and Mennell 2009). But whatever the basis, Goody continually attacked Elias the person as well as his work and continued to do this even twenty years after Elias had died.

In contrast with the examples just discussed, Rojek and Turner's (2000) critique is not only more-or-less fair in terms of the 'fair play' rubric (Anderson et al. 1985), but also contributes useful arguments to the ongoing debate concerning sociology's disciplinary development. In doing so, the authors evaluate Eliasian theory using a yardstick of their own making. Specifically, Rojek and Turner are interested in the various ways theorists have reformulated action theory. While this yardstick approach opposes Anderson et al.'s warning that theories should not be

evaluated in terms of an outside or contradictory criterion, it nonetheless succeeds in making some useful points. They indicate that, although overall many of Elias's ideas satisfy their criteria, his negligence in explicitly spelling out a means of application as well as 'precise methods of attaining [detachment]' are significant drawbacks (Rojek and Turner 2000: 643). However, I see this as a deliberate choice because Elias was not interested in future generations applying his work and instead encouraged people to use it in whatever ways they could sensibly devise (Elias 1986b[2008]: 266).

In discussing these critiques I reach the conclusion that, while some useful criticisms of Elias's work and approach have been made, these typically fail to engage with Elias's primary purposes and ideas. They instead only criticise selected aspects and treat their own approach as by definition 'better'. But readers and critics should instead consider theories on their own terms, minimising ad hominem or ad feminam attacks and focusing on the range of a theorist's work. Debate benefits from more measured voices who recognise the fruitlessness of right-versus-wrong and defaming theoretical battles. It is to some of these I now turn. Many sociologists, Dunning, Mennell, Goudsblom, Kilminster and Wouters foremost among them, have weighed, analysed — and built upon — Elias's ideas. Goudsblom (1987a; Goudsblom and Mennell 1998) has attributed the work of Weber, Huizinga and Freud as major influences on Elias's theoretical approach, particularly with regard to his interest in personality structures and habitus, and Maso (1995) argues that Elias was influenced by neo-Kantian epistemology. Kilminster (2007) compares Mannheim's work with Elias's, suggesting that their academic relationship heavily influenced Elias's sociological outlook. Much discussion proposes a series of similarities and dissimilarities between the work of Elias and other theorists (Kilminster and Wouters 1995; Mennell 2003; Dunning 2005; Spierenburg 2004; Scheff 2014; van Krieken 1990; Dépelteau 2013). These assessments may help in orienting Elias within sociology, but generally are not connected with considering what more might be done with his ideas. It is helpful to remember here Sica's comment that, 'Elias stands alone, even today, among social theorists' (Sica 1984: 74) and that this has a downside in encouraging people to apply rather than use his work.

Some studies have put Eliasian ideas to work in examining topics Elias himself never specifically wrote about, including Goudsblom's (1987b, 1992) studies in the domestication of fire, Sinclair's (2011, 2014, 2016) and Sinclair and Dolan's (2015) studies of heavy metal enthusiasts and Atkinson's (2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2006) studies of tattooing and straightedge subcultures. There have also been new insights about the topics Elias pursued, with his ideas about de/civilising processes being considered in other locales like America (Mennell 2007), Soviet Russia (Volkov 2000), Southeast Asia (Young 1997) and Greece (Woolf 1994; Jørgensen 2014), and the analysis of particular aspects such as violence (van Krieken 1989; Spierenburg 2001), public health (Goudsblom 1986; Gilliam and Gulløv 2014), interstate relations (Linklater 2004, 2011b), mediatisation (Hepp 2014), eating habits (Mennell 1987a, 1997a), medical innovations (Dopson 2005), public opinion (Gordon 1989, 2002) and culture (Volkov 2000). In addition many others, Dunning⁵ foremost among them, have expanded on Eliasian approaches to sport (Connolly 2013, 2015, 2016; Dolan and Connolly 2014; Maguire 1991; Green and Oakley 2001; Bloyce et al. 2008; Hanstad 2008; Evans and Crust 2014).

Regarding methodological uses, a small number of researchers including Baur and Ernst (2011), Dolan (2009), Bloyce (2004), Rojek (1986) and Maguire (1988) have attempted in various ways to synthesise Elias's work and construct methodological transitions from it. For instance, Baur and Ernst (2011) argue that the sociogenesis of figurational development can be investigated through comparative dual-level longitudinal analysis. Specifically, they propose that analysis of both historical and contemporary data at the micro-level (the individual) and macro-level (the figuration) will provide for in-depth understanding of the course of sociogenesis. But while they point out the importance of learning about how people perceive their figurational belonging (Baur and Ernst 2011: 124), there are some issues with their approach which will be discussed in the next chapter. There have also been attempts to use Elias's ideas in a range of ways. Of these, studies by Stanley (2015a, 2015b, 2015c), Stanley and Wise (2011), Goodwin and Hughes (2011), Dolan (2009)

⁵ See Dunning 1992a, 1992b, 1999a, 1999b; Dunning et al. 2004; Dunning and Rojek 1992; Dunning and Sheard 2005/1979; Curry and Dunning 2016; Curry, Dunning and Sheard 2006.

MacConville and McQuillan (2009) and Connolly (2015) are key examples. For example, Dolan (2009) uses a figurational approach to documentary analysis in a case study of changing Irish consumer behaviour. Utilising many kinds of documents including parliamentary debates, diaries, memoirs and advertisements to trace the sociogenesis of moral and emotional connotations, Dolan concludes that Irish consumers' networks of interdependence have become denser and more expansive throughout the course of the twentieth century, and that Ireland has gradually become enmeshed in global consumer figurations (Dolan 2009: 203). This is very much in the spirit of Elias's argument that figurations grow increasingly dense and also far-flung throughout the process of society's sociogenesis (Elias 1983[2007]: 77).

Given the aims of this thesis, it is important to particularly note some substantive uses of Elias's approach in sociological work concerned with death. Stanley and Wise (2011) contest the sequestration thesis in their examination of domestic figurational organisation. This adds specified and contextual detail to Elias's argument that people do not respond to death as 'windowless monads', but as members of interdependent relational networks (Stanley and Wise 2011; Elias 1979[2010]). They conclude that an Eliasian approach to death and dying not only demonstrates the continued meaningfulness of social and domestic bonds throughout the dying process, but also the significance of figurations in and of themselves (Stanley and Wise 2011). Many studies, including those by Lawton (1998, 2002), Clark and Seymour (1999), Hart, Sainsbury and Short (1998), Zimmerman and Rodin (2004) and MacConville and McQuillan (2009), have used Elias's ideas about the dying process in focusing on sequestration in palliative care situations. For instance, MacConville and McQuillan (2009) used ideas about figurational interdependence to explore communication and awareness in the dying process in Ireland, concluding that a range of contextual factors contribute to death acceptance in palliative care situations. Featherstone and Wernick (1995), Featherstone (1995), Field (1996) and Wegner et al. (1996) have also considered Eliasian theories in studies of ageing and practices of resisting bodily decline. Additionally, Wouters (2002) and Walter (1994; Walter et al. 1995) have used Elias's ideas in their studies of contemporary bereavement.

While such research has contributed many insights to ongoing debates, none to date have used Eliasian ideas to study funerals or funeral directors specifically. However, the substantive uses of his ideas have importantly contributed to my thinking, as I discuss later. Keeping Eliasian social theory in mind, I now turn to consider substantively relevant work in the death studies literature, which will also be drawn on in the following chapters of this thesis.

IV. Elias Walks into a Funeral Parlour: Some Key Literature

Now that I have introduced some of Elias's foundational ideas and considered some critiques and uses of his work, I turn to discuss some key literature related to death, sequestration and funerals. From an Eliasian standpoint, death acts as an often unwelcome destroyer of myths and many classic theories about how living people experience the death of others focus on topics of avoidance and denial. Becker's (1973) denial of death thesis has elements of Elias's view that people 'deny the foreknowledge of one's own death' (Elias 1979[2010]: 10), as does Gorer's (1955) presentation of death as 'pornographic' and 'taboo' and Freud's (1961) view of the illusion of immortality. Becker proposes that death denial is the universal problem and argues that many behaviours and practices are ultimately constructed defences for avoiding the knowledge of inevitable mortality (Becker 1973: 8). The sequestration thesis relatedly argues that, in association with the industrial, technological and medical advances of modernity, dying is becoming increasingly separated from living (Giddens 1991; Mellor and Shilling 1993; Mellor 1992). Mellor and Shilling (1993) additionally argue that contemporary views encourage hiding or ignoring death. They conclude that, in sequestering death, the associated dismantling of ritual and social value systems makes dealing with contemporary death 'so precarious and problematic' (Mellor and Shilling 1993: 428). Stanley and Wise's (2011) critique, mentioned previously, argues that although many dying people are sequestered in hospitals and care facilities, dying is actually more widely embedded in contemporary social practices. Sequestration does not undermine the importance of domestic figurations in the dying process because family, kin and other people's involvement is still very much a part of this (Stanley and Wise 2011: 945); and they refer to this as the 'domestication' of dying and death.

Opposing positions have been adopted regarding the relatively public or private character of contemporary death. One camp argues that private or sequestered death is intrinsic to notions of its relative goodness, i.e. a 'good death' (Smith 2006; Walter 1991; Willmott 2000; Lawton 1998; Young and Cullen 1996; Corr et al. 2009). While the literature sometimes does not differentiate these terms, there are important differences between 'private' and 'sequestered'. For example, Stanley and Wise (2011) point out that sequestered death is neither public, nor private, but something distinctive (Stanley and Wise 2011: 949). Whilst arguments by Giddens (1991), Mellor (1992) and Mellor and Shilling (1993) seem to assume and not contest the idea that institutionalised death is altogether private, Stanley and Wise (2011) counter that, in failing to question the assumption of a stark public/private dichotomy, they also fail to recognise that institutionalised spaces cannot realistically be categorised as strictly private or public (Stanley and Wise 2011: 948-51). Elias (1979[2010]) noted how the dying are pushed away and 'othered' by those in their domestic and wider figurations but does not affix dichotomous labels to these. For him, although the living may not understand the dying nor feel comfortable around them, loved ones may nevertheless be present throughout the dying process (Elias 1979[2010]). 'Private' death, if there is such a category, should not simply be considered as this because not occurring in a public setting. Collapsing complex matters of death and dying into public/private forgets that categories of this kind reduce the nuanced details, relationships and interactions to dichotomies.

In evaluating Gorer's (1955) theory of death as taboo, Walter suggests that death is not strictly taboo anymore and is 'not so much forbidden as hidden' in modern Britain (Walter 1991: 307). Reminiscent of Elias's (1984b[2013]) ideas about myths, Kearsley depicts denying death as a 'veil of order and meaning' counterbalancing death's chaos (Kearsley 1989: 26). Countering views of death as altogether private, an opposing camp argues for a recent upswing in public dying. On this, Walter (2009) and Woodthorpe (2010) suggest that the increased publicity given to death in Britain may be associated with increasingly widespread media attention and also the use of internet-based communication technologies. Walter et al. (1995) and Durkin (2003) have also pointed to the apparent comparatively high level of violence in contemporary visual media.

Rejecting this public/private dichotomy, others including Hallam and Hockey (2001), Walter and Gittings (2010) and Stanley and Wise (2011), have noted the coexistence of public and private elements throughout processes of dying and death. Walter and Gittings' (2010) study of back-garden burials in Britain, for example, undermines the sequestration thesis' dichotomous assertions in demonstrating that a renegotiation of boundaries and social views occurs. Hayslip additionally argues that understanding death-denial is more complicated than the literature suggests and calls for new work to investigate denial on personal, social and cultural levels (Hayslip 2003: 40). But whether death is public, private, a situationally-determined mixture or something else, it remains true that death in hospital or care facilities is currently more prevalent than in the past. As such many studies, including notably by Sudnow (1967), Timmermans (1998), Field et al. (1997) and Prior (1989), have centred around social issues of dying in hospital. Prior asserts that management practices in hospital separate dying from living people and play a decisive role in 'structuring the differentiated world of the dead' (Prior 1989: 112).

Another central dichotomy is that assumed between living and dead. This static and seemingly opposing relationship contains assumptions which need questioning. Recalling what Elias wrote about individual and society being two sides of the same coin (Elias 1987[2010]: 9), people are only considered to be alive because they die, and only considered dead because they were once alive. Elias might say here that people shift 'back' and 'forth' along a continuum throughout the course of being alive. People may become mortally ill, but recover; and it could be said that the process of living is also the process of dying given that all people die eventually. Further, it is actually impossible to understand whether the living and the dead are really at odds because there are no representatives of the dead who can attest to how it really is for them. Here van Gennep's ideas about liminality provide a perspective more in tune with Eliasian sensibilities. In conceiving death as a tripartite process, van Gennep's (1961/1909) arguments present a unifying rationale for ritual behaviours: such ritual goes hand-in-hand with the processes of changing status (see also Turner 1969). This recasts death in processual terms, presented through interwoven stages. Relatedly, Hallam and Hockey argue that death rituals act to 'order' both living and dead participants (Hallam and Hockey 2001: 188). In

marking the deceased's completed metamorphosis from living to dead, living participants in death rituals – including funerals – not only lay the dead to rest, but in doing so help themselves to acknowledge the death. Hockey argues that van Gennep's attention to identifying a common pattern in the relationship between ritual and life course transitions places emphasis on social context rather than seemingly autonomous personal experiences (Hockey 2002: 213), which again raises funeral arrangements.

I have touched on some key 'myths' which are reproduced and challenged in the literature, some of which relate to those Elias pointed out: assumptions of static change (Elias 1971[2009], 1989[2011]), personal autonomy (Elias 1987[2010]: 72) and use of binary categories (Elias 1983[2007]). A more central example for this thesis, and which unites many of them, is the myth that individual life has inherent meaning. Elias remarked that one of life's great sadnesses is the realisation that life is 'completely meaningless' (Elias 1984b[2013]: 105). However the obscuring myth-version suggests a person's life is meaningful by treating meaning as something that springs from the individual, unrelated to figurational interdependence (Elias 1984b[2013]: 105). Elias reminds his readers instead that, 'Meaning is a social category; the subject corresponding to it is a plurality of interconnected people' (Elias 1979[2010]: 43). However, the rise of individualism in many societies has reinforced the false separation between 'we' and 'I'. Elias suggests what gave his life meaning was the search for unobscured social reality, which is a pursuit necessarily bound up with a range of developing and interwoven groups and topics (Elias 1984b[2013]: 105). Meanwhile, the myth-version presents meaning-making in terms of what people (as individuals) add to their lives, thereby ignoring that meaning is actually co-produced through group interaction and also that what meaning conceptually signifies also develops over long time-periods.

Arranging funerals contemporaneously illustrates that meaning is co-constructed within and between figurations because today's funeral arrangement processes rely on the 'meaningful' recollections of people related with the deceased. Holloway et al.'s research finds that arranging meaningful and thereby 'good' funerals can help alleviate grief through processes of meaning-seeking, meaning-creating and meaning-taking (Holloway et al. 2013: 50, 2010), and O'Rourke et al.'s

(2011) study also demonstrates a positive association between participation in funeral arrangements and grief alleviation. The focus on meaningfulness in arranging funerals highlights yet another myth, that exchanges of money undermine meaningfulness (Zelizer 2005, 2006). The family-and-service-oriented and profit-be-damned sentiments that contemporary funeral directors often play up and which their customers may be comforted by help to reinforce the myth that money tarnishes, and thus to obscure the reality that a funeral transaction is the purchase of a set of goods and services. And so funeral directors and ‘the customers’ focus on co-producing a meaningful funeral, downplaying the monetary aspects and focusing on creating a ‘meaningful’ occasion.

Funerals as rituals may reify or construct meaning, and a ‘well-executed’ funeral will often convey that the deceased’s life was indeed meaningful (Caswell 2011a, 2011b; Walter 2005; O’Rourke et al. 2011). O’Rourke et al. (2011) also note that good and thereby meaningful funerals involve the participation of mourners throughout the arrangement process and ceremony. This links with other myths including the *homo clausus* (Elias 1989[2011]). How mourners go about explaining the deceased’s ‘meaningful’ life relies directly on figurations and how their members experienced this person. Re/producing meaning via the funeral has recently had attention in discussions of personalised funerals. Although Caswell’s (2009, 2011a, 2011b) research into Scottish funerals and Adamson and Holloway’s (2012) study of funeral music present funeral personalisation as evidencing a new phenomenon in Britain, Breathnach and Butler demonstrate in their study of Irish funerary traditions that nineteenth century funerals, for example, observed ‘no single orthodoxy’ and ‘plurality was a primary feature of Irish funeral customs’ (Breathnach and Butler 2013: 258). This suggests contemporary trends in funeral arranging have roots in earlier eras. Long-term views of funerals suggest un/planned and un/even interweavings of traditional processes, as discussed in the works of Gittings (1992), Litten (1991, 1997), Howarth (1997), Jalland (1996, 1999, 2010), Wolffe (2000), Cannadine (1981, 2013/1983), Davies (2002, 2005, 2015), Strange (2005), Bassett (1992) and Cooney (2013). But whether this or that custom is new is of little consequence because of more central concern is that the interest in personalised funerals and other supposed ‘emerging’ funerary customs are outcomes of wider

ongoing processes in society like secularisation, ontological shifts, economic fluctuations, local and national politics and so forth. This is discussed in later chapters and especially in Chapter Five.

Many sociologists of death have recognised the importance of a historical dimension. In overviewing studies of death along and across the *longue durée*, it is useful to recognise the valuable Britain-specific historically-focused works of Litten (1450s-1700s), Gordon (1600s-1800s), Howarth (1700s-1990s), Jalland (1910s-1970s) and Parsons (1940s-2000s). Particularly well-known with regard to the history of beliefs and behaviours surrounding death, Ariès's work explores details of the dying process and its gradual progression from public to private in western Europe. Although fiercely contested – including by Elias – Ariès, with a broad brush, weighs differences in dying processes in contemporary and earlier periods of history (Ariès 1974, 1981; Elias 1979[2010]).⁶ Davies proposes that small-scale studies have complimented Ariès's broad approach including in relation to sequestration (Davies 2005: 17). And some of Davies's key works (2002, 2005, 2015) follow Ariès in presenting broad historical views of death in specific contexts. Such long-term approaches to death studies highlight that much of what happens surrounding death and dying develops in tandem with other facets of social life. Jalland's (1996, 1999, 2010) work, for example, traces developing practices through the Victorian and First World War eras around such contributing influences as religion, politics and hygienic innovations. Changing practices and views surrounding death are also clearly linked with disposal practices and the businesses which have managed disposal and ceremonial commemoration of the dead at different times over the centuries.

A large body of literature focuses exclusively on the United States of America's funeral industry. This includes work by Sanders (2006, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2012), Barley (1980, 1983a, 1983b), Laderman (2003) Habenstein (1954, 1963, 2002), Habenstein and Lamers (1955), Pine (1975, 2015), Lynch (2004), Cahill (1999) and Harrington (2003, 2007), and has been to an extent fuelled by Mitford's

⁶ Elias argues that, while Ariès presents 'admirable' findings that may be of use in debates of 'immortality fantasies', he fails to orient these findings within the context of long-term continuum (Elias 1979[2010]: 73-4).

(1963, 1998) work. Trompette's (2007, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2013) developmental studies of the French funeral industry are also notable in demonstrating the complicated interplay of economic, political and habitual influences on the everyday business of buying and selling funerals. While comparisons between funeral markets can prove helpful, as with Clark and Szmigin's (2003) comparative study of funeral consumer activity in the United Kingdom and the United States, it must be underscored that each national market is decidedly different because a wide range of nation-specific developmental factors are in play. Although many studies in the sociology of death incorporate funerals, few have focused on the British funeral trade. However, work by Howarth, Jupp, Parsons, Walter, Davies, Hockey and Gittings together with historians Jalland, Litten and Cannadine, discussed below, has researched funerals and funeral firms from various perspectives and traced some stages across the sociogenesis of the industry (Farrell 2015; McClean 2016; Brown 2016). Some major themes in this literature pertain to the emergence of the British funeral trade, its over-time structural, professional and organisational development and changing situations and practices of funeral directors.

Regarding broad processes, Parsons considers that Jalland's (1996, 1999, 2010) and Hockey's (2001) depictions of funeral practices demonstrate the importance of a long-term view, noting that 'Clearly... a combination of factors have influenced funeral ritual, and this change during the twentieth century can be attributed to a number of developments that have their origins in the previous century' (Parsons 2003a: 611). Although here Parsons seems to argue for a view of change over the medium term, his other work has a more Eliasian view of developments in funerals and the funeral trade having been gradual (Parsons 1997, 1999, 2011, 2014, 2015). Parsons (2003a) continues that, in addition to changing public health regulations and religious beliefs, there have been three primary influences on the development of the funeral industry in Britain: 'the introduction of standardized death registration, the establishment of the private cemetery, the interest in cremation' (Parsons 2003a: 611). Jalland points out that religion too played a sizeable role in nineteenth century funerary expectations, with half the population of Wales and England still attending Church in 1851 (Jalland 2010: 2). She also emphasises that, during the First and Second World Wars, demographic changes and

innovations in health standards also influenced the formation of the British funeral industry (Jalland 2010). Focusing on the effects of the Second World War, Cannadine (1981) relatedly argues that funeral customs were changed by wartime life especially in terms of the increased threat to civilians, a sharply rising death rate, greater social recognition of life's brevity and a related refusal to dwell on death. For Howarth, all these factors contributed to the post-war social interest in 'low-key' funerals, at odds with the pre-war approach (Howarth 1997: 127) and also at odds with particularly extravagant funerals as intermittently featured in contemporary media. Kellehear (2007), Howarth (1997) and Gittings (1992) suggest that urbanisation in Britain also contributed to the transference of preparation and disposal of the deceased from neighbours and kin to professionals. And while the literature agrees that family-managed funerals served as the funeral industry's main point of origin, Howarth (1996, 1997) and Litten (1991, 1997) also point up how eighteenth-century undertakers to an extent modelled their businesses on practices for the nobility.

Regarding the sociogenesis of the funeral industry on a structural level, studies have taken one of two broad approaches, either focusing on structural developments at particular periods, as seen in Jalland's, Parsons' and Howarth's work, or else examining broad trends across several centuries, as in Litten's and Gittings' work – and there is overlap between them. These help consider the funeral industry's structural development. First, the process of industry formation has been traced, including by focusing on related legislature and other changes influencing development. Litten comments that, in the early years of the funeral trade, tradesmen operated on a largely unregulated basis with no written rules or codes in place (Litten 1997: 54). The lack of trade-specific legislation has been associated with the monetary and social exploitation of customers during this stage (Howarth 1997; Litten 1997: 54-9). As burial legislature came into effect, this impacted on death-related beliefs and disposal proceedings during those eras and relatedly led to the funeral trade becoming an increasingly differentiated occupation (Parsons 1997: 45-8; Howarth 1997). For example, the Metropolitan Interments Act of 1850 ruled that corpses could no longer be interred within two hundred feet of a domicile (Howarth 1997: 125). Among other factors, this Act physically distanced the dead from the

living and created the need for undertakers to have regular access to modes of transport (Parsons 1997).

The transition from family- and community- to business-based funeral management has also been traced. Elias comments that ‘...changes in power and dependency relationships often take centuries to become perceptible, and centuries more to find expression in lasting institutions’ (Elias 1939[2012]: 304-5). Regarding the centuries-long development of what is now the British funeral industry, five broad overlapping and un/evenly developing stages are discussed in the work of Howarth (1996, 1997), Parsons (1997, 1999, 2003a), Gittings (1984) Litten (1997), Strange (2005), Fritz (1994) and others. They note that firstly there is a long history wherein family, neighbours and local tradesmen prepared and arranged funerals for family and community members. Before the latter part of the eighteenth century, it was most common for family members and neighbours to take charge of all funerary tasks: washing and preparing bodies, building coffins, pall-bearing and so forth.

Second, around the beginning of the eighteenth-century tradesmen from cabinet-making, joining and upholstering backgrounds – and especially those in large cities – came to focus more on the building and selling of coffins and sometimes also provided other goods and services as requested. Third, by the late eighteenth century, these tradesmen gradually began rebranding their businesses as ‘funeral undertaking firms’, and some such firms are still in business today. These firms were run either as independent for-profit businesses or later in the 1920s as members of local co-operatives (Jupp and Walter 1999). The undertaking firms, often run by members of a family, continued to offer further funerary goods and services in accordance with local demands (Howarth 1997: 120; Gittings 1984).

Evidencing Elias’s (2007a) idea of professions developing in accordance with specific social needs, ‘funeral undertaking’ gradually became an occupation to address situations wherein city-dwelling people found themselves responsible for death preparations, but lacked close neighbourhood links or nearby family (Gittings 1992). The ‘funeral undertakers’ were so called because they ‘undertook’ what had

earlier been predominantly a familial responsibility.⁷ The funeral tradesmen of that time, often still moonlighting in other trades, were highly influenced by the local family-managed funeral practices of that era and had often participated in managing previous community funerals. But, in cities especially, these tradesmen also sometimes aspired to funeral traditions and practices of an aristocratic kind (Howarth 1996, 1997; Litten 1991, 1997; Fritz 1981; Cannadine 2013/1983). Gittings argues that the funeral undertaking occupation helped foster the increasing social withdrawal of mourners, and over time this contributed to the increased control of undertakers in making funeral arrangements – and especially in decision-making about these (Gittings 1984: 96). Around gaining increased control, funeral undertakers continued expanding their firms' offerings and eventually consolidated the necessary elements in-house. Over time, these service providers grew into full-service funeral firms as the practice of family-managed funerals receded.

Fourth, funeral firms gradually became more numerous as family-managed funerals fell out of common practice. Over time, these firms came to merge, divide, form associations, traditions and common and differentiated views, with large stakeholders becoming discernible over time. Fifth, in the contemporary context, British funeral firms are part of various industry sub-groups, including co-operatives, family-owned-and-run, family-run with conglomerate oversight and fully-franchised firms. Three key groups of funeral firms are now predominant: independent firms, collectives of co-operative firms and firms that operate under the purview of a large multinational company called Dignity Plc (Parsons 2014, 1997, 1999, 2003a, 2003b; Walter 2005; Storey and Marlow 1990; Cowling 2010).

In tracing the more recent stages in the British funeral industry's development, Hockey (2001) Howarth (1996, 1997) and Parsons (1997, 1999, 2003a, 2014) in particular have illuminated many over-time links between historical and contemporary situations. These discussions of the industry's structural development note the unfolding interdependence of social beliefs, laws, professionalisation and changing matters within funeral firms. Relating back to questions of sequestration,

⁷ The term 'undertaker' was also used to denote other types of service providers at that time, but 'undertaker' persists today only as a well-known synonym for 'funeral director'.

Walter (2016b) argues that increasing expectations of privacy and distance surrounding death may have contributed to the development of firm-managed funerals. Parsons (1997, 1999, 2003a, 2014) more broadly suggests that major industry changes were influenced by both internal and external aspects, including burial and cremation laws (Jupp 2006; Walter and Gittings 2010), wartime concerns (Cannadine 1981; Jalland 2010; Parsons 2011), increasing institutionalisation of dying (Seale 1998; Lawton 1998, 2002) and decreasing familial involvement in funerary preparations (Walter 1996b, 2005). These influences not only foster processes through which early funeral undertaking firms coalesced into an increasingly complex industry figuration, but also manifested in the rebranding of undertakers as ‘funeral directors’ (Parsons 1997, 1999; Puckle 1926), a focus on transactional risk management (Unruh 1979), increased business transparency (Parsons 2003a, 2014; Walter 2016b) and the gradual consolidation of many funeral firms within conglomerate companies (Saunders 1991; Storey and Marlow 1990; Jupp and Walter 1999; Cowling 2010; Walter 2016b).

Contemporary British funeral firms are still not subject to any industry-specific national regulations (Walter 2016b). During the late-1990s era of major extra-national funeral conglomerate mergers, the Office of Fair Trading (OFT)⁸ kept watch over funeral businesses, in particular regarding instances of malpractice (OFT 1995, 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2001d). However, it concluded the funeral industry was not a ‘priority sector’ because ‘there is no evidence of significant consumer detriment or lack of competition’ (OFT 2001b: 6). To counterbalance this, the National Association of Funeral Directors (NAFD) sought to enforce mandatory industry regulations and codes of practice for members (Parsons 1999), as well as instituting optional diploma and certification programmes for would-be funeral workers (Valentine et al. 2013). Additionally, the Funeral Standards Council (FSC),⁹ the Society for Allied and Independent Directors (SAIF) and the Good Funeral Guide have also contributed to enforcing industry guidelines and fostering channels for consumer informedness. The funeral industry’s professional organisations continue

⁸ OFT was dissolved in 2014.

⁹ FSC merged with the NAFD in 2004.

to work with government bodies, urging for more oversight, and the Scottish Parliament's recent Burial and Cremation Act (2016) includes provisions for how to implement future regulations in the funeral industry as well as rubrics for licensing, inspecting and implementing a universal code of practice for all Scottish funeral directors (Scottish Parliament 2016: 47-52).

At the level of the funeral firms, only a handful of studies have focused on the daily work of British funeral directors, including those by Howarth (1992), McCarthy (2016), Bailey (2010), Bailey and Walter (2016), Parsons (2003b) and Hyland and Morse (1995). Regarding the myth mentioned earlier that money corrupts meaningfulness, these studies to different extents convey that the ritual-relational elements of funeral arrangement processes are at odds with the business elements, whereas in following Elias these are surely two sides of the same coin. In discussing funeral arrangement, Bailey (2010) argues that funeral directors have a far more complex part to play than workers in other professions, given that their customers may also require emotional care in addition to purchasing products and services. In comparing data from small and large firms and weighing emotional management responsibilities against more stable and 'commercial' aspects of the work, Bailey concludes that funeral directors are ultimately motivated by profits rather than caring sentiments because they consider emotional management to be 'part of the job' (Bailey 2010: 220). This conclusion is reached by implying that the funeral industry, unlike other industries, should not be motivated by profit. But why not? While funerals and their arrangement processes are more heavily influenced by emotion and ritual than other purchases, the funeral industry is foremost a for-profit one. Like every for-profit business, funeral firms need to make money in order to continue operating. Regarding expectations of emotional management and following Walter's (2016b) argument, there is evidence of funeral directors replacing priests in the funeral arrangement process, because historically people would first telephone a priest who would provide consolation and perform other funerary duties. Although priests and parishioners may have enjoyed long-term relationships, funeral directors may not know their customers well and often will only come to know them through the arrangement process itself. As such, emotional management is a tall order for a

limited transactional time-frame and is more appropriately an expectation of domestic or social figurations than it is of hired disposal managers.

Ultimately funeral firms are motivated by profit. There is nothing wrong with this because, as noted earlier, funeral firms are businesses which cannot continue operating without making a profit. However there continue to be studies reinforcing the money versus meaning dichotomy. For example, Clark and Szmigin argue that funeral arrangement processes act to trap consumers in a 'structure of captivity' and provide them with little personal choice (Clark and Szmigin 2003: 16). In arguing this, they assume that such choices are important to consumers, while Corden et al. argue that consumers obviously have greater concerns and trust funeral directors to 'do a good job' (Corden et al. 2008: 104). This study also finds that consumers are generally too emotionally burdened to make the requisite choices, and often do not want to anyway (Corden et al. 2008). At basis the literature about the buying, selling and arranging of funerals concerns whether funeral service providers are taking advantage of or overcharging their customers, with the underlying notion here being that monetary transactions and death should be kept separate.

Cutting across this dichotomy, Zelizer (2005) argues that intimate relations and monetary transactions often coexist and co-mingle in everyday life, but that in spite of this people continue to assume that the two should be kept separate and can be separated from one another. In questioning the interplay within and between intimate and professional figurations, Zelizer's work (1978, 1989, 1996, 1998a, 1998b, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2010) in the Eliasian sense destroys this myth by showing the interdependence between matters of economy and intimacy. Zelizer (2006) argues that common misconceptions stand in the way of understanding the actual interplay between intimate relationships and monetary exchanges in the market (Zelizer 2006: 34), and her work confronts and demolishes the myth that money corrupts sacred elements of interpersonal dynamics and domestic figurations. The difference between purchasing funerals and other purchases of goods and services is primarily that funerals are about death, and may involve a more complex interplay of intimate relations, social influences, unsavoury emotions and expectations than other transactions. Funerals are one of the main purchases nobody wants to make (Theron 2013).

Although a great deal of interesting and insightful work has been written, which I will put to work in framing my research, there is less work on funerals and funeral firms. The long-term history of funerary customs has been thoroughly canvassed, and while this illuminates much about the development of the funeral industry, the research involved has mostly been of a first-this-then-that kind. But what do the funeral directors think about all this? How do they, the people making up the firms and the industry and its figuration, perceive the developments happening around them? What do they do, how are they linked, what things do they share? How do they see the structure of the industry, its past and its future, and where is the funeral in all of this? And where is the figuration?

V. Taking Off with Elias

Elias and I are embarking on the research road together to explore these questions, and I will be driving. Many Eliasian scholars have let Elias drive and have consequently not added much to his legacy. Letting him drive – i.e. applying Elias's ideas as though the law – ignores his trumpet-call for future people, whether social scientists, historians or anybody else, to put his ideas to work, to explore with them and develop them for each specific research purpose (Elias 1986b[2008]: 266).

In beginning this journey, I have placed Elias in dialogue with the substantive literature on death and funerals, and in doing so have come across some interesting ideas about how to frame and where to begin my research. I will continue to incorporate these into my uses of Elias in subsequent chapters. With regard to death, I am influenced by ideas about changing social beliefs and practices surrounding death and dying, and especially the 'placeness' of the corpse throughout funeral arrangement processes. With regard to the literature on funerals, I am interested in the social underpinnings of ideas about funeral firms as 'non-businesses' and also draw on ideas about meaning in funerals regarding how these may impact on funeral directors' work over time, as well as how they may point up broader shifts at work in society. And I am particularly engaged by work which illuminates the changing everyday realities for British funeral directors, in particular ideas about long-ranging 'traditions', firm-and-family values, and the broad over-time developments which the industry has undergone.

By and large, in my thesis I am more influenced by Elias's work than by points made in the death and funerals literature. However, there are some 'big ideas' in this which I am influenced by and which I follow through on in the later chapters. Firstly, the historical literature on the British funeral industry's developing structure along with ideas of 'invented' tradition are brought to the fore in Chapter Three's analysis of perceived longevity within and among firms. Secondly, literature pertaining to the changing role of the funeral director and dramaturgical analyses of funerary work are central to discussion in Chapter Four. Thirdly, sequestration and issues in what this means is a major topic in the analysis provided in Chapter Five. Using these interesting ideas to inform 'what I do next', subsequent chapters place Elias in dialogue with the funeral directors I interviewed. And as this indicates, this thesis is foremost about using Eliasian concepts to do sociology. How do these ideas work in my research? When do they not work? What else is at play and in what ways? In exploring aspects of change – and also stasis – surrounding, within and between British funeral firms, funeral directors and the funerals they arrange and the figural aspects of these, I shall return to what Elias said and wrote, continue to run my thoughts by him and re-engage with his ideas. Like any sociologist, he can be wrong on some things, but correct given different uses of these same ideas.

My aim is to explore the over-time developments of the funeral firm figuration which helps to comprise the funeral industry, doing so by exploring the standpoints of present members. Elias (1989a[2013], 1989[2011], 1939[2012]) has much to say about generational chains and what may/not be passed on from one generation to the next. The accounts of present members, when taken together with their memories of 'the old days', passed-down stories, and the historical literature on funeral directing, illuminate how Elias's concepts work or do not work in these generational and sedimented contexts and what sorts of aspects, beliefs, behaviours and practices persist and why. In relying on the in-depth ideas, accounts and recollections which contemporary independent funeral directors have about their daily lives, their collective past and where it all may lead, my thesis explores how members of funeral firm figurations perceive changes occurring around them in the context of long family work-traditions.

As part of this, my concern is to understand questions about how: particularly how members of funeral firms experience being part of a figuration in process, and whether flux is indeed a constant in this. Relatedly, I am interested in how they perceive changes at different stages ranging from the now-past to the lived past to the past an earlier cohort lived through. And it is important to note that, in talking with them about what has changed, I also learned about what has stayed the same.

The substantive chapters of this thesis will use several important Eliasian ideas, confronting and synthesising these with the everyday life accounts of the funeral directors I interviewed and focusing on the various ‘how’ aspects involved. In the next chapter, I explore methodological matters about using Eliasian ideas in practice, and I do so by trying out my approach around his central concept of figuration. Following this, Chapter Three focuses on Elias's ideas about sociogenesis, Chapter Four does this with habitus, and then I bring all of this together in Chapter Five around the overarching set of ideas known as the theory of the de/civilising process.

Before I go on, I want to draw attention to the fact that this thesis does not involve applying Elias’s ideas and theories. As noted earlier, Elias is unusual among social theorists in that he encourages readers not to replicate but to use his ideas to study anything they want and in whatever ways they can sensibly devise to do so (Elias 1986b[2008]: 266). In an interview, Elias explained that ‘How it goes on from there is a matter for later generations’ (Elias 1984b[2013]: 103) and that he does not expect that ‘everything will be adopted by the next generation. [But] ... that some of it will be adopted and continued in research or artistic work or any other kind of work’ (Elias 1986b[2008]: 266). The approach in this thesis sets Elias’s ideas to work. In the spirit of Elias, it does not apply but thinks with Elias and brings his ideas into conversation with social life, recognising that in specific times, places and circumstances some of his ideas will and others may not work. In thinking with Norbert Elias I am putting his ideas to work by using them on my research road, so as to place them in dialogue with specific times, places, circumstances and persons surrounding a topic – death and disposal – and how it is lived out and reflected on by independent funeral directors and firms.

The next chapter begins the process of learning to think with Eliasian ideas, exploring methodological matters around his core concept of figuration.

Chapter Two

On Not Applying Theory: Chasing the Figuration of Funeral Directors

‘...in the case of the scholar, my own case, I feel fulfilment to some extent, on account of some of the things I have done. They have meaning, they give me fulfilment. But this does not mean that I expect that everything I say will be adopted by the next generation’ (Elias 1986b[2008]: 266).

I. Introduction

Chapter One introduced a number of Elias’s key ideas and set these on the road towards the figuration of funeral directors. This chapter will discuss approaches I assessed in arriving at my own way of thinking with Elias. I have so far introduced a number of interesting aspects of Elias’s ideas and have alluded to my view that many Eliasian scholars seem to operationalise and apply, rather than use these in contextual terms as Elias himself did. With the aim of following Elias, this chapter will explore the process of how I learned to get away from notions of ‘applying’; and it will be concerned with methodology and not method in the specific sense, although I do consider some of the questions around specific methods. My first foray in thinking with core Eliasian ideas concerns the figuration, and in this chapter I explain what I am attempting methodologically by discussing how I went about contextually using figuration in practice. Figuration is key to this chapter and, in using it as a jumping-off point for future chapters, the chapter will try out ways of not-

operationalising and not-applying and instead exploring and learning how people actually ‘do it’, in my thesis in the context of British independent funeral firms.

My thesis is centrally concerned with notions of doing because, when I started out, I thought of myself as operationalising and applying Elias’s ideas. This is partly because, generally speaking, it is a main presumption built into social theory. Elias (1970[2012], 1983[2007]) himself is dissatisfied with the idea of applying concepts, and having emulated and reworked his own approaches to doing research I would now agree. I have learned my lesson after trying to apply figuration, and have come to realise that applying is fundamentally discordant with an Eliasian approach.

I discuss figuration first because it is the most basic element in the ideas I consider to be central to Elias’s work. This is because figurations, interdependent webs of chains of interacting people (Elias 1986a[2009], 1939[2012]), are what develop and influence development over the course of sociogenesis. Across all the social contexts considered in this thesis, figuration remains central – it is intrinsic to Elias’s fundamental ideas of sociogenesis, habitus and de/civilising processes. More directly speaking, figuration was one of the first key things I noticed out of the interviews carried out (discussed later). In the conversations we had, the funeral directors repeatedly impressed upon me the fundamental nature of links between people. Throughout these discussions, they made frequent reference to other people and their relationships with them, their families, their colleagues, their contacts, community and so forth, and their shared traditions, practices and beliefs. So in this way the concept of figuration impressed itself upon my thinking from an early stage, but whilst recognising that in certain social contexts people may do it differently. I discuss later how this unfolded around the work I did with the people I interviewed in constructing time maps and discussing these.

II. Thinking About How to Use Eliasian Ideas in a Context

If I do not want to apply Elias’s ideas, how should I go about doing so methodologically? What are the alternatives, and how should I begin putting Eliasian ideas to work in context? This section suggests some ideas about ‘not applying’ around figuration. In thinking with Elias’s ideas about figuration, sociogenesis, habitus, and de/civilising processes, I gradually began to consider the British funeral

industry, funeral directors and their work in more interrelated and processual terms. However, the process of arriving at this way of thinking involved my slipping back into the conventional thinking of applying at a number of points along the way.

In wanting a recipe rather than ideas to think with, some sociologists including Layder (1986), Aya (1978), Rojek and Turner (2000) and Silverstein (2013) have criticised Elias for not explicitly spelling out specific methods to apply his ideas. Rojek claims, 'His writings include no alternative manifesto, no plans for the future. In place of them he suggests that a more accurate understanding of the structure and dynamics of figurations is the true path to improve the orientation of human beings' (Rojek 1986: 593-4). Perhaps researchers should instead adopt Elias's suggestion and follow the figuration/s wherever they may take us, rather than continue the fruitless search for ways to apply. As mentioned in the previous chapter, fair play readers of Elias will understand that he has deliberately avoided providing explicit methodological instructions, because for him any given use of his ideas hinges upon the situation to hand. Although not focusing on specific and prescriptive methods, Elias is very concerned with sociological methodology throughout his writing, especially in his work on research-based balances of involvement and detachment (1983[2007]), his outlining of process sociology especially in *What is Sociology?* (1970[2012]) and also his weighing of sociological and historiographical approaches in *The Court Society* (1969[2006]). Regarding shortfalls of historiographical approaches, Elias's view is that historians use a basis for representing historical connections which is 'very largely left to the whim of the scholar' and that they consider people's actions to be unstructured and unconnected (Elias 1969[2006]: 36-7). Elias concludes that the task of sociology is 'to bring the unstructured background of much previous historical research into the foreground and to make it accessible to systematic research as a structured web of individuals and their actions' (Elias 1969[2006]: 29). This conclusion and the two aspects mentioned are perceptible in what he does in his later works and are interwoven with many other key methodological ideas. Taking Elias's advice in what I do procedurally in my analysis of materials amassed through research, I continually remind myself of the interdependence of people and their actions, as well as keep in mind that my aims are structured around Elias's ideas, the prospect of finding the figuration and of

uncovering ‘what is really going on’ in society. Building upon his methodological perspective, Elias continues to impress upon his readers that sociologists ‘have to discover for themselves which methods of research are best suited to the making of discoveries in their particular field of enquiry’ (Elias and Dunning 1986[2008]: 6). And Bloyce relatedly argues that ‘it would be inappropriate to provide ground rules for sensitising concepts’ (Bloyce 2004: 150).

Taking Elias and Dunning’s (1986[2008]) and Bloyce’s (2004) advice, and throughout the process of discovering for myself, I have considered and ruled out a number of potential methods. In what follows, I will briefly discuss six of these and consider why they are inadequate for my purposes. Firstly, carrying out a social network analysis of funeral directors would undermine thinking with Elias because networks are cross-sections, sets of connections at particular points across the long-term processes of social development; and social network analysis, with its eye on other concerns, would also not give insight into how and why funeral firms as networks came to be as they are. Secondly, a large-scale social survey of funeral directors would prove insufficient for my aims because, while surveys have considerable strengths, they can incorporate neither long-term developmental shifts nor the increasing varieties present within and between figurations over time. Survey methods are static: they are ‘now’. And their longitudinal varieties are at best repeated cross-sections largely aiming for broad similarities rather than exploring the specific differences composing their data. Thirdly, an ethnography of a funeral firm is feasible for the purposes of my research, but would give only a limited albeit very rich account of just one node in the industry. I am interested in the differences and similarities of many funeral directors from different firms, who come together in a figuration of all British funeral directors, and how they understand and perceive the over-time developments in their work and their industry. As such, even a small set of focused ethnographies would encourage my fixing on particularities and not broad overarching and over-time understandings. Fourthly, structured interviewing seems insufficient as this would only uncover the information I already know to ask questions about. Fifthly, a historical sociological investigation conducted to retrieve a broad historical timeline or main events narrative is also discordant with Eliasian ideas because it would homogenise the various specific histories of the figurations

comprising it. And lastly, although I could always follow Elias's own historical and developmental approach, I want to 'get at' figurations as they are unfolding and to learn about how members understand the interwoven developments happening around them, and thus it would not be the best approach for learning about what I want to know.

In evaluating a range of methods and pinpointing those that are not feasible for my aim of thinking with Elias about this specific, I continued to search for something workable. Given my interest in chasing the figuration and learning about how present members perceive and explain its unfolding, interview-based approaches seem most practical. However, this must be used to interpret people's accounts in terms of the homines aperti (Elias 1989[2011], 1987[2010], 1983[2007]), by understanding what they say in terms of a 'We-I' rather than an 'I' perspective. Put simply, I would be interviewing members of figurations, and learning about their varying we-perspectives, rather than recording the 'autonomous' views of individuals. Commenting on Goudsblom's (1977) argument that comparing different 'we' perspectives can aid in understanding how figurations are interrelated, Maguire adds that this approach 'can yield immediate knowledge of the local "scene", as well as insight into how the here-and-now fit into more encompassing figurations and long-term developments' (Maguire 1988: 191). Relatedly, my approach must also convey that things are continually but unevenly in medias res. Largely speaking, I must reconceive the British funeral industry as a set of nested and interwoven figurations, each with specific and differentiated habituses, set within the long-term processes of society's over-time development. In doing so, I must also understand that throughout this sociogenetic process, the encompassed interwoven figurations of people engage with, are influenced by, and contribute to, the ongoing de/civilising processes. In beginning to put Elias's ideas to work, I developed a set of research questions that reflect my attempts to use Eliasian ideas contextually. My aim was to explore them substantively in terms of how funeral directors themselves think about the world as it is changing, and make sense of what they are doing in it. This is now discussed.

The first research question asks, 'How does the funeral arrangement process normally play out?'. The Eliasian underpinnings of this pertain to how the firm figuration is affected when new short-term members (customers) enter for the

specific purposes of arranging a funeral, and also what role the firm's habitus has in influencing arrangement processes. It also includes what traditional practices, trademarks and styles of work they may have which set them apart from other firms. This question focuses on both longer-term and shorter-term figurations and aims to examine interrelationships within and between them. It is concerned with similarities, and while it is also true that every funeral is different, specific funeral firms will arrange funerals in particular but perhaps also like-minded ways.

The second research question asks, 'How have developments in the British funeral industry influenced the work of funeral directors?'. The Eliasian underpinnings of this question relate to how broader sociogenetic developments in the composition of an industry figuration (comprised of firm figurations) may influence the daily work of funeral directors and their views of the industry in process. Whatever the specific differences between firms, they share membership in the industry figuration and as such this is a good jumping-off point for understanding how broader changes play out in particular contexts. In order to understand the unfolding realities within funeral firms, it is also necessary to orient them within and along a social continuum without beginning. Elias would agree that the un/planned but structured processes manifesting as 'industry developments' do not rise out of the short-term, and do not make full sense without considering what came before. The ways in which particular British funeral firms perceive and explain industry developments, and how these influence their day-to-day, may also illuminate over-time developments in the firm's figuration composition. In situating particular funeral firms within broader industry changes, this question helps explore and learn about the developing interdependent relationships between 'broad' and 'local'. And although people and their firms are interdependently related, this does not mean there are no conflicts or differences within and between them.

The third research question asks, 'How do funeral directors perceive a 'normal' work day?' The Eliasian ideas underpinning this question concern how firm members perceive and explain the habitus of their figuration. But, as habitus is a sedimented and accumulating set of beliefs and behaviours, the question also necessarily relates to generational similarities and differences across the over-time development of funeral firms. The question is especially focused on how a 'normal'

day and ‘normal’ ways of doing the work are different from or similar to the ‘normal’ of previous generations. It also raises how firms understand and explain ‘who they are’ as a figuration, what norms develop through their interactions, what is passed on and what has faded.

The fourth research question asks, ‘Do present-day funerals resemble other kinds of necessary consumer purchases in Britain?’. The Eliasian underpinnings of this question relate to de/civilising processes, and in particular how funeral firms perceive their work changing in accordance with the developing habituses of their customers and also overarching social trends. Considering de/civilising processes together with other ideas about ‘wild’ death (Ariès 1974), the organised, managed and death-less qualities expected of contemporary British funeral firms may illuminate developments in perceptions surrounding death and the purchase of funerals. In itself, death is wild because it cannot be controlled or avoided in the way that behaviours and practices can (Elias 1979[2010]). Aiming to minimise the incalculability surrounding any death, its management has been a relatively constant social aim. Although death’s management is a social phenomenon found in many other situations and changes across time, the events which make buying funerals necessary (i.e. dying and death) have separated them from other sorts of consumer purchases. However, perhaps there is a de/civilising trend that is lessening this divide?

The above research questions put Elias’s ideas in a specific context and are framed by thoughts about stages in the industry’s and Britain’s development, while different ideas come to the fore in each of them. Elias’s core ideas work as an interrelated set, which has encouraged me to think processually. I have thus put Eliasian ideas to work in ways which show the import of time and highlight the interweaving of people, events and practices across it. But of course time is complicated, the history is not altogether well-documented or well-remembered, and people live, work and remember in ways largely consonant with their habitus at its present stage of development (Elias 1977[2009]). Given my interest in understanding how funeral directors conceive the unfolding character of developments in the remembered past and present, tracing the sociogenesis of British funeral firms thus involves learning about the developing realities of the figurations undergoing it. As a

result of my focus, thinking with Elias involves degrees of reliance on funeral directors' accounts by treating these as the interwoven ideas of expert members of a figuration of figurations. This emphasis on the firms comprising the industry, and how the funeral directors conceive their work, lives, histories and traditions allows for rich processual stories interweaving to illuminate in-group understandings of developments over time. As a result, the research questions changed throughout my process of researching.

In exploring how to use Eliasian ideas in my research, I eventually came to the conclusion that emphasising an overarching main events narrative history would be misleading. As noted earlier, thinking in terms of a general timeline in this way acts to mash together and smooth out the variations, particularities and contradictions of processes developing over time. After all, Elias repeatedly points out that time is not altogether linear, and that processes may develop in many directions and at uneven rates (Elias 1939[2012], 1969[2006], 1984[2007]). In order to explore and test this, I used the scholarly literature to construct such a timeline. This plots the foundation of industry organisations, implementation of various relevant laws, dates of the World Wars and key events surrounding several important mergers of funeral firms. Although learning the dates and main events later provided a useful base of common knowledge for conversing with funeral directors, this was the extent of the exercise's usefulness. There is far more to understanding the developing figurations of funeral directors, their firms and their industry than a series of well-documented main events, so I then decided instead to explore this through drawing up a series of figural time maps based on the accounts in interviews of present members. These maps represent firm-based stories that trace significant events as perceived by specific funeral firms. They involved funeral directors in co-constructing the histories of their firms, and centre around the aspects they see as significantly changing their daily work lives over time. The maps provided me with a set of context-based histories which exist at a skewed angle to the main events narrative timeline, as there were interesting intersections and departures. I will discuss strengths and problems with the maps and how I used them later in this chapter.

Although Baur and Ernst (2011) and Bloyce (2004) give some prescriptive advice on how to use an Eliasian perspective, and particularly figuration, alongside

current social science research methods, the majority of the secondary literature on Elias remains made up of theoretical debates, critiques and overviews. However, I am certainly not the first to use Elias's concepts in present-day, comparatively short-term sociological research contexts involving direct interaction with people, and several notable Eliasian studies have used interview-based approaches. Mansfield (2008) used Elias's theory of involvement and detachment in her interview-based research into femininity and fitness activities. O'Connor and Goodwin (2012) re-interviewed some original subjects from Elias's the 'Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations and Adult Roles' Project (1962-4), people with whom Elias himself had never spoken. Ernst (2015) interviewed colleagues of Elias in her research into his life-as-figuration in terms of generational chains. And Castrén and Ketokivi (2015) used interviews in their figural approach to studying the dynamics of family relationships. These studies chose this approach because all were trying to get at the figuration from a present-day vantage, although Ernst's (2015) and O'Connor and Goodwin's (2012) studies do also include considerable over-time components. Also they all use interviews rather than proxy measures because the desired information can best (and in some cases only) be accessed through interaction with living group members. However, Castrén and Ketokivi (2015) essentially flatten the figuration into network through focusing on who knows whom rather than using the relational connections to learn about the over-time shared reality within it. Ernst (2015) and O'Connor and Goodwin (2012), given their focus on people related to Elias or his borrowed research data, do not build upon Elias's key ideas. My view is that none of these studies completely reconcile (or adequately address) the differences between people's interview-based accounts and Eliasian ideas, mainly because they apply Elias's concepts without weighing their goodness of fit in context. Elias himself worked inductively and let the particular scenarios of interest guide his use and development of theory, and in particular this was how he advanced his ideas about the de/civilising process over the course of his life, as discussed in Chapter Five. However the ways in which Elias went about researching eschewed research designs involving living people, with his data being historical and derived from documents.

In wanting to approach interviews differently by thinking with Elias, and remembering what kind of information would open up the figurational matters I am most interested in, several decisions followed. First, the initial interviews I carried out were structured just enough to convey that I had properly prepared. In other words, I prepared some broad questions, and mostly used them to encourage conversational flow as needed. Especially given his ideas about habitus, Elias (1989a[2013], 2007a) would probably agree that a person cannot decide what is ‘important’ for somebody else, particularly if the people concerned do not share membership in a common figuration. It is better that people tell researchers what is important to them, because they are working members of the figurations being investigated (Patton 2002; Rubin and Rubin 2011; Gray 2011/1980). Putting what Burgess (1989) and Bechhofer (2014/1974) wrote in more Eliasian terms, as an outsider I cannot know in advance which questions to ask about in order to understand the composition and development of the figuration/s I am interested in, given the general and abstract knowledge I possess. I cannot know a priori about any ‘bigger picture’ ideas regarding figurational membership and overlaps with other figurations in the ways that people living these entities know them (Patton 2002). And, of course, structured interviews only deal with aspects already known about. Patton agrees, arguing that ‘The weakness of the standardized approach [to interviews] is that it does not permit the interviewer to pursue topics or issues that were not anticipated when the interview was written’ (Patton 2002: 286).

Secondly, in exploring the question of how funeral firms are located on a figurational level, having particular habituses and being situated in specific ways in relation to other firms, the local community and the industry, I consider that different aspects will be more or less relevant and interesting to different members of different firm figurations (Patton 2002: 281-2; Harvey 2011). Consequently, asking everyone the same sorts of questions would not enable finding out about degrees of variation across different firms. Although research interviews are often nothing like ‘real-life’ conversations (Bechhofer and Paterson 2000: 63; Denzin 2001: 25), this is a good goal to strive for. Thus, rather than having set questions, a more sensible aim is to interact in ways which encourage the interview to approximate the flow of a mutually interesting discussion. Anything an interviewee tells me about is relevant,

because they found it worth saying to me in their process of explaining ‘who they are’ as part of a firm, how they experience their daily work, and the changes they have perceived.

Thirdly, entering a funeral firm with a research request is to have already altered the firm’s figural dynamics in the short-term. Funeral firm employees are accustomed to new people (usually customers) arriving, and have a professional approach to placing people. However, I was present as neither mourner/customer, nor job applicant, nor co-professional. On several occasions while waiting for a scheduled interview in a reception area, an employee approached me with a consoling look preparing to say a kind word about being ‘sorry for my loss’, but their disposition changed when I identified myself. Understanding interviews as a form of social interaction and thus approaching them as I would an informative and friendly conversation proved beneficial given my audience, who were more accustomed to casual talk than academic research (Goode and Hatt 1952; Cicourel 1964; Rapley 2011; Collins 1998; Coffey 1999). I do not wish to imply here that interviews can easily become everyday conversation, but rather that in order to learn about the topics of my interest, interviews can be presented in terms of a low-key and enjoyable if rather focused talk (Kral 2014; Sinha and Back 2014; Bott 2010; Lippke and Tanggaard 2014). In my case, and given that funeral directors are more accustomed to meeting people in the context of arranging funerals, creating an atmosphere in which I could hope to learn about their perceptions of the past and unfolding present necessitated making it apparent that this was not a formal meeting. ‘Formal meeting’ would have associated our encounters with the sombre professional qualities of funeral arranging (Harvey 2011), and thus would hinder discussion of the everyday and the changes from their firm’s point of view. In addition, I found that low-key conversations were associated with ‘talking shop’, including many topics of interest. Kral (2014) argues that the researcher/researched relationship is central, and so each first interview was my chance to start building. Ezzy (2010) also notes that the emotional framing of interviews is important. Here the researcher must endeavour to build some kind of relationship, and also gauge the emotional tonalities most appropriate for the given interview environment – and this of course calls for engagement rather than detachment (Ezzy 2010).

Over the long-term, the British funeral trade has developed into a large and increasingly dense industry figuration comprising many nested, less complex firm figurations. From this perspective, I can begin learning about how people and events are situated by asking about the firm, familial and local histories, and also what has changed according to specific firms. These figural accounts of firms highlight the increasingly varied but similar ways in which each group has developed and intertwined over time, and they also accentuate the unplanned and uneven but structured character of long-term development. As noted, every funeral firm is different and will work and interact with/in the industry differently according to many factors. The intersections and dissimilarities between these firm accounts enable me to explore Eliasian ideas in detailed contextual ways, and think about how they work or do not work, and what they illuminate or obscure. Having assembled a set of ideas with which to embark on my research into the developing work-lives of contemporary British funeral directors, the following section begins to explain how these ideas are put to use.

III. Meshing Figuration with Mundane Research Practices

The Eliasian ideas I use in this thesis are interwoven and cannot be separated out, and all have their basis in relational thinking. A starting point is to investigate how figurations are organised within the everyday activities of funeral firms, initially focusing on learning about the relational frameworks involved with the expectation that the other interrelated ideas in their ‘real-life’ incarnations will also become discernible. And because the present builds on the past, and because being and doing are intertwined with belonging, with habitus and with the processes of de/civilising, then understanding what is unfolding involves many complexly related factors which will need unpacking. Obviously I cannot know at the outset what figural membership and interaction consists in for funeral firms and funeral directors, how these practices and relationships are situated within the industry, and whether the many composing parts fit or do not fit together. And because I am not a member of the figurations of interest (Elias 1983[2007], 1986a[2009]), this leads me to let the people I speak with tell me what is what (Silverman and Marvasti 2008: 27-35; Patton 2002: 278-81).

To begin unpacking the figural relationships involved, my analysis needs to take into account the sociogenesis of the figuration/s of interest (Bloyce 2004; Baur and Ernst 2011). But, how should I begin pinpointing where and how a figuration can become discernible? Elias (1983[2007], 1970[2012], 1986a[2009]) explains that all people are bound together in figurations, and that any person cannot be independent of all figurations, and so a useful first step is to talk with one person in each of several different funeral firms. In explaining everyday happenings in a firm, developments in the funeral industry and their own part in them, the interviewees inevitably mentioned other people in relation to themselves. Stanley points out the truism that “‘self’ does not exist in isolation from interrelationship with other selves and other lives and is grounded in the material reality of everyday life’ (Stanley 1993: 206); and thus because people explain themselves in relation to their shared activities with others with whom they are closely associated, the idea of figuration can be explored through asking about these relationships. It is also helpful to talk with other funeral directors at a firm too – specifically, the people who were mentioned as significant by the first people spoken with. Talking with several employees, in addition to revealing more about how the firm figuration works, can also give a preliminary sense of its habitus through considering the similarities in how different people explain the firm. Additionally, because important relationships develop over time, and because everyday happenings between people intermingle across the unfolding past and present, the funeral directors’ accounts often linked with their references to over-time developments in the firm and the industry generally.

With figuration being central here, my approach involves first learning about each firm’s sociogenesis and habitus, and related de/civilising processes as perceived by firms in the industry at large, and then disentangling the figural aspects of these. These are ‘big’ ideas, and as I have explained regarding figuration specifically, I can begin learning about particular figurations and the others by asking interviewees to explain how things ‘work’ in their firms and whether and how this has changed over time (Maguire 1988: 192; Espinoza et al. 2014). But, before I could do this, I had to find people willing to talk to me and with whom I could interact, with the idea of doing so to a large extent on their terms.

Grappling with how to think with Elias, I arrived at a simple conclusion. This is that the concept of figuration and its connection with sociogenesis relies on an Eliasian blend of ‘common sense’ ideas. Because I am interested in unfolding figurations as perceived by present members, my approach involves people. In order to find out what there is to know (about figuration), I need to speak to people (members) already in the know (Paulus et al. 2010). The ensuing discussions employed what Littig and Pöchhacker term ‘expert interviews’ which ‘seek to narrow the knowledge gap between themselves [the researchers] and the expert [the researched] as a key strategy’ (Littig and Pöchhacker 2014: 1093). Although Atkinson and Silverman (1997) and others have criticised the increasing centrality of interviews, this approach is still the most sensible option for me in this particular research. Figurations are arrangements of people, and as such I cannot adequately learn about their unfolding qualities and perceptions of this by present members in any other way. As mentioned earlier, given my research aims, textual forms of data have provided me with necessary background, but oral accounts are central to my search for information.

In beginning the process of locating willing interviewees, I emailed personally addressed letters to approximately seventy independent funeral firms around Britain and received assenting responses over time. My letter explained my interest in learning about everyday work within funeral firms and how this has changed. I chose not to telephone for various reasons, mainly because I did not want to monopolise a phone-line used by customers. Although I did initially cast a wide net and contacted Dignity Plc, as well as the Co-operative Funeralcare and some other smaller co-operative conglomerates including Scotmid Funeral Directors, my focus began to shift toward independent firms exclusively. While I was originally most concerned with structural divisions between the independent and the conglomerate figurations in the funeral industry, my growing aim of chasing the figuration led me to become particularly interested in the figuration of independent funeral directors, which is the longest-ranging figuration in the industry. Despite also comprising some newer firms, many firms in this figuration have been in business since the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. Given this, it follows that a focus on the independent funeral directors’ figuration would complement an Eliasian long-term

perspective. Prioritising my efforts accordingly, the people I interviewed were all members of this figuration, and this over-time interdependence within and between them gives what I have done a particular strength.

A difficulty in arranging to interview funeral directors is that death cannot be planned. After scheduling convenient times to meet, there was always the chance that a death would ‘occur’ and the meeting need be rescheduled. As a related precaution, some funeral directors only agreed to schedule meetings a day or two in advance. The customer comes first, and I was not a customer. Consequently, I made it my practice to confirm meetings the day before. With the size of firms where I interviewed ranging from three staff members to several thousand, everyday practices in scheduling varied. For example, in the case of larger firms, keeping a scheduled meeting was not a problem because all the independent firms where I interviewed had a rule that ‘whoever takes the initial call handles the funeral from start to finish’, and there are a greater number of funeral directors answering phone calls at larger firms.

In preparing for each interview, I reminded myself that funeral directors are usually fastidious dressers, because appearances matter. Whether this refers to a corpse’s face, a tidy reception room or the customer’s first impression of the funeral director, appearances matter throughout the funeral industry (Hyland and Morse 1995). Understanding this, I made sure to look my best for interviews as first impressions – in the visual sense – set the tone for the ensuing encounter (Coffey 1999: 65; Bernard 2011: 169-70; Eriksson and Kovalainen 2008: 81). Additionally as a woman-researcher entering largely male-dominated settings (McCarthy 2016; Pine 1975; Barley 1983b), I attempted to act and dress in ways that underscored my role as ‘researcher’ rather than ‘just woman’ (Soyer 2014). Because funeral directors meet all sorts of strangers as part of their daily work, they are likely to have a developed repertoire of categorical assessments of people’s appearances. Accordingly, I dressed to convey that I am a professional, that I take their business seriously, and that we may be able to communicate successfully.

The interviews with the independent funeral directors were always at their places of work, and they picked the time. Interviews were often conducted one-on-one, but I also interviewed groups of them where possible (Bjørnholt and Farstad

2014). There were many train journeys to get to the interviews, and during these I often remembered film footage of Elias lighting his pipe, sitting on a train, watching the landscape zoom past and musing about the passage of time. In the particular film sequence he said, ‘...that is how we speak – “time is passing” – we are very much awake to the fact that while we do this [gestures at his wristwatch], time is running away...but we have to time it [behaviours and actions] in accordance with the enormously finely grated interdependence of our life in society’ (*Lessen van Elias* 1975: 46:25-46:36, 49:32-49:44). For Elias (1984[2007]), time does not exist independently of social interaction. As such, the things intermingling across the sociogenesis of society develop, not because of time, but because of the sequences of developments in themselves. Taking Elias with me on my journey, my research process has involved three overlapping senses of passing time.

First, throughout the process of research the independent funeral directors periodically commented about their work as involving practices of merging the ‘new’ and ‘old’ and in my view they did so in ways that are somehow ‘out of time’. After considerable time spent in a variety of funeral firm reception rooms, I understand these spaces as almost always timeless in the bland sense. Funeral directors present themselves in a similar way, in that I was often unable to tell by clothing or haircut which decade they were from. Second, regarding the time of interviews, I often left the interviews marvelling at the realisation that I had structured an entire day (or even several days) around the prospect of a lengthy conversation. And it is extraordinary how much can be learned from a single conversation. The actual length of the interviews seemed out of synch with what was gained from them: interviews seemed lengthy given the range of things I learned, and at the same time short because the conversations were so engrossing. Third, thinking over what I have learned since becoming interested in the British funeral industry, time can be understood as a kind of yardstick for organising achievements and failures. In the busiest research phase, a week spent with nobody new to speak with dragged on, while a busy week with interviews was over in a wink. Becoming deeply involved with research, I had trouble remembering what year it was or what time-period I was located in, as my learning through research experiences began to replace more conventional markers of personal location and passing time.

People may generally mark their lives in terms of a temporal yardstick but, as Elias (1984[2007]) demonstrates, there is no such thing as time in the sense which people harness, perceive and understand it. People experience time via proxies like clocks and calendars, which aid in habitual methods of self-regulation rather than measure the processual developments of the social, or organic and grounded movements of planetary bodies (Elias 1984[2007]: 39). While this socially-understood version of time encourages people to perceive their lives in terms of a strict temporal progression, the actual course of a developing life is instead characterised by processual shifts, shortfalls and successes interspersed throughout that do not coincide with a clock's regular movement and a calendar's succession.

Each interview started in a similar way. On entering a funeral firm, a woman behind a nearby reception desk greeted me. It was always a woman, and an interviewee explained to me that 'Women are better suited to this work – more understanding' (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Stoker 4.6.2014: 100-1).¹ Many of the male independent funeral directors I interviewed referred to the receptionist and secretarial posts in terms of 'we have a woman', which is a rather antiquated phrase, but it does express how they appear to perceive women's roles in the firms.² At the same time, they also seemed to understand women's roles in the firm as indispensable and of comparable importance to funeral directing. Although there are an increasing number of woman funeral directors in the British industry (Cathles et al. 2010), and despite having spoken with a handful of women who are or have been managing directors at their firms, the division of labour I came across was usually gendered in a particular way: women at the front desk and overseeing the reception area, and men in the back preparing things for the funerals.

While at the funeral firms, I tried to absorb every detail of the physical and social surroundings, and to think about the characters and behaviours as well as the accounts of the people I spoke with (Plummer 2001). Part of this concerned the ways

¹ The quoted text here is an excerpt from an interview. Throughout this thesis, material from interviews are cited using the surname and first initial of the interviewee/s, the date the meeting took place and the corresponding line numbers from each fieldnotes entry or interview transcript.

² The ways in which some interviewees explained women's roles in their firms made me wonder if they had forgotten I was also a woman myself.

people move through space within a firm (Hall et al. 2008), and unsurprisingly the extreme cases were most memorable. In several firms, people continually darted from office to office, scrambled to answer telephones and rushed around with stacks of paper. In some other cases, there was quiet and stillness, with no visible rushing, and instead people moved slowly and conversed in hushed tones.

After waiting in the reception area, a funeral director would emerge, shake my hand, ask for somebody (a woman) to bring coffees, and lead me into an office or meeting room. After a, ‘So, what can I do for you?’, I briefly introduced my research and asked for the story of the firm since it started. I expressed my broad interest as the development of particular firms within the historical development of the industry, and with a concern for what independent funeral directors find most interesting and important about their work (Atkinson et al. 2003: 107, 133). After they spoke, I asked for more detail or additional questions of a ‘what about?’ kind (Coffey and Atkinson 1996: 58; Hammersley 2013: 12; Rapley 2007; Harvey 2011). In beginning my thinking with Elias, I found myself still trying to apply concepts and to categorise what I saw and heard, and continually had to remind myself of how Elias would have done things. Hughes proposes that ‘...the real value of his [Elias’s] work resides in the model of doing sociology embedded in his approach’ (Hughes 2013: para 20). Theory and methods have to mesh (Silverman and Marvasti 2008; Koro-Ljungberg et al. 2013). If they do not, something is wrong, and discovering what this is takes time. In the case of Elias, who would surely consider a separation between theory and method to be a false dichotomy, his lack of a prescribed recipe for applying leaves things open to re/thinking through learning and doing. As a result, and over time, readers are able to discern the interdependence of theory and method across his writing. Through reading and re-reading Elias’s works in relation to my own research context, further possible approaches became more apparent and led to re/consideration.

Most of the interviewed funeral directors, regardless of how friendly their greetings were, sat down to begin speaking with their arms crossed, perhaps indicating degrees of guardedness or discomfort. I first noticed this during my pilot interview and, as I continued to interview other funeral directors the ‘crossed arms’ phenomenon persisted. Each time my silent goal was to encourage them to assume a

more relaxed position, and I found two approaches helpful in achieving this. First, I interspersed my responses and questions with allusions to ongoing events in the industry, mergers, scandals and so on to suggest that I ‘know my stuff’ (Harvey 2011; Zuckerman 1972) and thus hopefully shortening the divide between researcher and researched (Aldridge 2014; Bondy 2013). Ezzy argues that ‘Knowledge experienced as communion requires mutual recognition, which acknowledges the interdependence of the researcher and the researched’ (Ezzy 2010: 169). My bringing up subjects of mutual interest may also have encouraged them to provide more detailed information given my implied base-knowledge.

Second, I found that humour helped foster comfort and a solid basis for a researcher/researched relationship. MacLure et al. argue that ‘humor seldom seems to be a good thing for the serious projects of research’ (MacLure et al. 2010: 496-7), but I disagree. Although my research has involved interviewing people surrounded by death and the everyday realities of decay and disposal, various of them stated that they must try to find joy and humour wherever they can, lest the sadness of their work overtake them. That being said, I came to understand the independent funeral directors I interviewed largely as people who love to laugh. This has not only been useful in creating a mutually comfortable atmosphere for conversation, but also led to discussion of a range of interesting and unforeseen topics. These factors together with a conversational approach helped exchange knowledge in a useful yet comfortable and enjoyable way. As evidence of my approach being successful in these contexts, although my initial email advised meetings would not exceed forty-five minutes, most interview lasted for around an hour and a half or longer on the day. In reminding each funeral director that forty-five minutes had lapsed and asking whether they now had other business to attend to, each waved me off with an interest in continuing our talk.

‘What I wanted to know’, then, was left broad, open and largely dependent on the organisation of events and people in ‘the story of their firm’ that people provided. Telling ‘the story’ always included both long- and short-term aspects, with broad changes and detailed anecdotes interwoven throughout. Elias’s understanding of people as present-thinking is problematised by the practical ways in which the concept of ‘now’ is mobilised in day-to-day use. ‘Now’ is over in the instant the

word is uttered, so practical understandings of ‘the present’ necessarily incorporate past and potential future in enacting the ‘now’ (Stanley 2013). Likewise, the average person does not describe or explain daily interactions and practices in terms of short-term or ‘now’ activities or immediate outcomes. Instead, such things are connected across durations and the accounts of the independent funeral directors made this apparent. The funeral directors did not tell about their everyday realities in terms of the disjointed present, but frequently referred back to their firm’s past and also forward to projects and ideas for the future. Another matter of interest is that their accounts of everyday work and the ‘story of the firm’ as told became the stories of an organisational We-I developing over time (Stanley 1993, 2013: 6-7). In this, it was notable how much the independent funeral directors had to say about their great, and even great-great, grandparents at the firm, and how much they knew about how the firm started. In explaining their firms to me, they displayed discernible pride and belonging and I think appealing to such feelings encouraged a flow of information (Palmer 1928: 171-2). The ways in which the people I interviewed described their firm’s history, their daily work and how these compared with their recollections of their parents’ and grandparents’ day-to-day were all extremely informative (Suárez-Ortega 2013; Bal 1997; Czarniawska 2004). The descriptive qualities and ordering of the stories told are important (Barthes 1977; Taylor 2013; Brannen 2013; Espinoza et al. 2014), and I consider this in the following chapters, for they have explanatory power in signposting how people are organised and organise themselves within a given figuration and consequently they may also provide ideas about how it developed over time (Morrow 2013; Plummer 2001; Coffey 1999). In their accounts, the independent funeral directors explained themselves and their activities by describing them in relation to other people, with the details also indicating aspects of how people are interrelated and, through this, how people and firms are organised on a larger scale and over time.

As an outsider to the figuration/s I am interested in, I will never know them in a direct sense (Elias 1970[2012]). However, there are intermediate positions between outsiders and the established (Elias and Scotson 1965[2008]). In my case this was developed by divesting myself of any assumptions about death, funerals and funeral firms. Elias intends something along these lines in advocating approaches designed

to understanding things as they ‘really are’ for the groups of people concerned (Elias 1984b[2013]). I asked the funeral directors to describe their everyday work, to tell me what they see as important about this and also how they see their firm’s history as fitting into the broader scheme of the industry’s development. By asking them to explain what they think in such broad terms, I was told about things I would not have known to inquire about, aspects unique to particular firms and events that are only vaguely represented in the literature (Rubin and Rubin 2011: 18; Burgess 1989). Among other things I learned vocational terminologies, illustrative anecdotes and gained many insights into the local organisation of people between and within firms over time. In other words, I amassed a considerable body of information not known to complete outsiders and perhaps not accessible by those asking predetermined ‘important’ questions.

I deliberately chose not to record the initial interviews with members of a firm, nor take notes or refer to a list of questions (Peabody et al. 1990: 453-4; Harvey 2011: 436-7; O’Dwyer 2004). At the start, I thought about recording the interviews and requesting permission for this, but there were two intertwined factors which dissuaded me from doing so. One pertains to a number of journalists who have recorded interviews and published slanderous accounts based in misrepresenting these. Given these events I was concerned that the funeral directors would see me in a similar light and be suspicious of my aims should I behave like a journalist (Harvey 2011; Hammersley 2013; Aldridge 2014). Second, having in previous research³ chosen to record interviews with funeral directors, I generally came away from interview settings feeling it had been an uncomfortable exchange and that they had sidestepped many topics of interest. People who are not accustomed to being recorded will act differently when being recorded (Marshall and Rossman 2011: 205-6; Harvey 2011). And in my experience, recording or otherwise taking copious notes also often means that awkward topics are not discussed. In my search for what is ‘really going on’, I instead wanted to provide the firm representatives I interviewed with the most comfortable and best possible experience so as to encourage them telling me about their perceptions of important and changing factors. The choice not

³ This refers to the research I completed for my MSc Research dissertation (Sereva 2011).

to record then necessitated learning auditory-visual memory skills, which were practised using a set of memory tricks to help me concentrate on the conversation and make appropriate eye contact. This allowed me to learn in a structured way from each interview while also helping interviewees get into a comfortable way of speaking. Therefore I have a set of detailed fieldnotes, which are extensive commentaries on the meetings which were written immediately afterwards and added to subsequently, and in addition I also have verbatim recordings for subsequent interviews.

After each interview, I sat quietly for a time recalling the interviewee's voice and mannerisms and the particularities of what was said, jotting down each aspect in order of recollection (Coffey 1999: 119-23; Jenkins 2010). Relating to Jenkins' (2010) approach to ethnographic transcription and in order to remember more clearly at later dates, I wrote up each interview as soon as possible. I also made additional notes about the details of the rooms I visited and what the interviewee looked like to me, including any other details that would help recall our conversation to memory later on. Not having interview recordings to rely on also encouraged me to remember a conversation's character and other descriptive cues during the transcription process (Rubin and Rubin 2011: 100-1; Silverman and Marvasti 2008: 154). These decisions aided in retention of more complete recollections. I also continued to add to the interview records whenever I remembered previously overlooked aspects. As an added measure, assurances were gained that I could contact the people interviewed again about particular things they told me. None of them objected to my recording subsequent interviews: they already knew me, had a reasonable expectation that comments would be anonymised when used in my research and knew I was not a journalist. After writing up the interviews, I read the commentaries or transcripts many times. Additionally I made notes of similarities and differences across the interviews as I continued to read them at frequent intervals.

After completing sixteen interviews in total, I found it had become difficult to recall which themes and topics were associated with which interviews. Therefore as an organisational tool I used a software program called 'Annotations' to organise each interview in terms of the themes and topics discussed, thus allowing me to record similarities and differences and additional observations across all of them. As

variable analysis was not an aim of this research, I chose not to use main qualitative data analysis software. Indeed, Blumer points out that ‘the crucial limit to the successful application of variable analysis to human group life is set by the process of interpretation or definition that goes on in human groups’ (Blumer 1956: 685). Having read through each interview many times, highlighting passages in terms of associated themes and topics, contextualised ideas about how Elias’s concepts of figuration, sociogenesis, habitus and de/civilising processes work began to take shape, and these are discussed later. Appendix II provides summary accounts of each interview and also a list of interviews and personal communications.

When talking with the independent funeral directors, it was surprisingly easy to lose sight of the monetary and corpse-related aspects involved in arranging funerals. But without exchanges of money and bodies there can neither funerals nor means of continuing the business. Although the business of funeral directing seems predicated upon a relationship between these two aspects, they continually vanished from the accounts given of people’s daily work. At first I considered that they failed to mention them because they did not find them especially remarkable, and ergo that the short-term transactional figurations that form when customers arrive are also not significant in their long-term view of things. In other words, I was thinking along the lines that customers visit funeral firms to arrange funerals at what the directors experience as frequent intervals and in many cases they make little impression. It may also be that, when taking the ‘profiting-from-death’ idea into account, corpses and money are the two aspects of the business which funeral directors are not keen to raise in their explanations. Another possible reason is that asking funeral directors about arranging funerals is like asking people how they breathe: it is so fundamentally ingrained that it becomes second-nature. Likewise, death, the dead and money are at once everywhere and nowhere, hidden yet essential (Stanley and Wise 2011). Accounts of arranging funerals and corpses were mentioned to me largely in an anecdotal way: in cases where, for example, a transportation or storage issue had occurred or in sensational stories about memorable outliers. These included a hired accordion player with dwarfism, a hearse breaking down on the motorway, a corpse with a huge neck, a corpse too fat for the morgue refrigerator, an escaped mental patient who refused to vacate a display coffin, a journalist mistaking donated

pot planters for children's coffins and the customer who paid the £35,800 funeral bill in full with bank notes.

Thinking about these anecdotes in the context of people's everyday work narratives (Coffey and Atkinson 1996: 55; Brannen 2013), I have come to understand this 'second-nature' relationship between funeral directors, corpses and funerals as based on seeing arranging funerals as 'interrupting' the general run on of everyday work: 'I was doing my work, and then some customers came in wanting a funeral'. But at the same time, arranging funerals is the daily work, and I will discuss this interesting conundrum in later chapters. Also, in impressing upon me the fundamental nature of their interlinked relationships in the industry and over-time, I noted that those links did not encompass the mourners. This may be because the mourning customers are the 'dynamis' (to use Derrida's phrase) for funeral firms, as the thing that propels and preserves (via the ability to continue business) the firm figuration by erupting at various points in their working weeks, as well as disrupting.⁴ Entering periodically from 'elsewhere', mourners/customers stop the firm from its smooth working as well as make it possible for the work to continue. But many questions remain about the unfolding realities of funeral firm figurations, and how best to think about this with Eliasian ideas. The following section will show how, in pursuing funeral firm figurations, I grappled with practical and seemingly mundane ways of thinking with and not applying Elias's approach and gradually arrived at some conclusions about this.

IV. An Exemplar: Following Figuration

How does one understand figurations in practice? How can I recognise their unfolding qualities throughout the research process? I used to think the figuration was 'there', for I had slipped back into thinking in terms of 'thingness' and 'placeness'. However, I have (hopefully) grown out of this, as I now understand that figurations assemble for purposes and are not what is a priori always already 'there'.

⁴ For Derrida (2003, 1996, 2005), 'dynamis' is the term for the potentiality or efficacy of a not-yet realised state; and as a set of happenings beyond the contextual logic of any one person or group of people.

A figuration cannot easily be pinned down. Any such pinning would likely result in a snapshot of a broad panorama and take on unacceptable cross-sectional attributes. Figurations are not containers for people, as without people they cease to be. In a sense, stopping time and exploring matters concerning ‘who knows whom now’ would enable the researcher to arrive at understanding a network within a figuration of interest, but the figuration itself would remain elusive (Stanley 2015a). This is because figurational relationships are characterised by qualities which unfold gradually and are not coterminous with network links (Elias 1970[2012], 1986a[2009], 1922[2006]; Stanley 2015a).

Elias gives the examples of a dance (Elias 1968[2012]: 526) and a football match (Elias and Dunning 1986[2008]) to illustrate figurational interaction. In chasing the figuration, I came to understand that, by and large, many people conceive and explain figuration in quite literal and unquestioning thing-like ways: the repetition that it is a dance (van Krieken 1998; Bastardas-Boada 2014; Giovannini 2015) or a game (Mastenbroek 2002; Castrén and Ketokivi 2015; Quintaneiro 2006), that everyone on the figurative dance floor or playing field of interest is interdependently related (Sica 1984; Powell 2013), that the figuration is continually in process (Sinclair and Dolan 2015; Kaspersen and Mulvad 2016; Linklater and Mennell 2010: 388n13) and that thinking in these terms circumvents static ideas (Quilley and Loyal 2004; Bax 1978). In the previous chapter I introduced some critiques of Elias’s work, with many of these claiming figuration to be wrong or unworkable. So as it stands in the literature, there is not much middle ground between ‘uncontested and thing-like’ on the one hand, and ‘incorrect and unreal’ on the other. However the middle ground is perhaps more interesting because it allows for re/thinking the concepts. Relatedly, Elias would have preferred future generations to think rather than accept or reject. Regarding the dance or football match examples, one might ask why there seems to be the underlying assumption that when the people are not dancing, playing ball or engaging in whatever activity, they are not ‘seen’ or considered. What about the people who are in the same space, but not participating in any way (to which Perulli 2011: 10n19 makes reference)? Are they not part of the figuration? What about the unseen people who are nevertheless there, or connected with the dancers, players or watchers in some capacity? In funeral firms, for

example, there are people doing many kinds of work and they may be placed at opposite ends of or outwith the building, but this does not mean they are not interrelated through mutual membership in a firm.

There are common elements to all of Elias's examples of figuration, but what comes to the fore differs. Given that my figuration of research interest involves people in a professional capacity, Elias's figurational example discussing the development of the British navy is of help, as he argues that 'They all, professions, occupations or whatever their name may be, are in a peculiar way independent, not of people, but of those particular people by whom they are represented at a given time. They continue to exist when their present representatives die' (Elias 1950[2007]: 27). The funeral industry has outlasted the lifespans of its earlier funeral directors and many of its funeral firms, with the whole being different from and more than the sum of the earlier parts (Elias 1970[2012]: 67-8). Although the sociogenesis of an industry transcends any given person or organisation, understanding the qualities of its development needs to start with the specifics and work 'outward' from there. Elias did things this way, as with his example of the fork which he used to help trace the long-term development of table manners (Elias 1939[2012]; Burke 1996: 30). Although the funeral industry is made up of many firms and related organisations, there are both differences between firms and interesting similarities. Proceeding by amalgamating these specificities would produce a kind of soup that would tell little about each firm in particular, would not illuminate the part-whole relationship, and anyway would deny the key features of my approach to thinking with Elias. However, learning about the daily interactions within independent funeral firm figurations and how funeral directors' ideas about the past inform and impact on the present, and evaluating these on a case-by-case basis, avoids 'main events' while revealing variations, similarities and developments.

Elias argues that if people were to disregard the uniforms and other insignia associated with the naval profession, they would then realise that this and other professions are groups of people performing specific and specialised tasks; and as professions develop, they gradually become 'institutionalised sets of human relationships' (Elias 1950[2007]: 27). He therefore concludes that any study of a profession should take into account the groups involved over the long-term, the

profession's changing function and also its members' relationships to this and each other (Elias 1950[2007]). Where the British funeral industry is concerned, it is clear that the over-time institutionalised interrelationships shared by the independent funeral directors and the core activities they carry out are central to understanding how things have changed, and what has stayed the same.

In attempting to put Elias's (1950[2007]) advice about professional figurations into practical use after the initial interviews, I became engaged by the question of how to get away from main events narrative approaches in thinking about developing funeral firm figurations in the funeral industry. Critically examining how and in what ways each firm's daily interactions, habituses, development and history are different, and evaluating such things separately for each funeral firm, has led me to several conclusions, returned to in subsequent chapters. In using Elias's ideas to think about my research encounters, and recognising the sophistication of how people represented other people, events and connections, I thought it would be useful to visually depict the information from each firm, including for them to comment on in subsequent meetings (Buckley and Waring 2013). That is, these maps were something concrete which I could return with and discuss with the funeral directors.

These visual representations were compiled as maps attempting to plot each firm's sociogenesis. However what was not in my mind at the time, but is now, is that the whole point of the maps was to get at a firm's figuration as it unfolded in front of me through discussion with members present about their shared and remembered past. The maps included all the people involved in the business (and uninvolved family members) over time, separated by approximately thirty-year generation lines. For each map, I included all the people mentioned in and remembered from the initial interview. Then I visited the firm's website and, where possible, filled in missing members from the firm's 'Our History' and 'Who We Are' pages. Once I had organised names in generational-, familial- and business-belonging terms, I sent draft maps to the people interviewed. In five cases, the maps sparked further meetings and much conversation and interest in terms of what was missing or incorrect and ways of 'fixing up' this. Of these five firms, face-to-face second interviews were secured with three of them: R L Stevenson & Son, O Wilde & Sons and Conan Doyle & Sons, and also I engaged in extensive email

correspondences with two more of the funeral directors previously spoken with at C Dickens & Sons (Carl) and W Shakespeare & Son (Sloan).⁵ For all five these second encounters started with the maps, but also involved interesting and useful discussions of a range of further relevant topics, including what it is like to be a funeral director, family stories, information about ongoing firm projects and anecdotes about arranging funerals. The second interviews were with the same people as before at Conan Doyle & Sons (Julian) and O Wilde & Sons (Alex), but at the request of George who I initially interviewed at R L Stevenson & Son, his mother (Lily), brother (Alan) and father (Tobias), who also co-manage the firm came to discuss the map during my second visit. Of these five secondary encounters, I recorded two of the interviews and compiled hard copies of both email correspondences. Following these interviews, I listened to the recordings whilst typing what was said verbatim. This proved difficult regarding the interview with Alan, Lily and Tobias at R L Stevenson & Son, firstly because our conversation ran for two and a half hours. Secondly, and pointing up Elias's ideas about We-I, the three often talked over one another or finished each other's sentences. The interview with Alex at O Wilde & Sons was comparatively straightforward and largely centred around stories of his family. I chose not to record the second interview with Julian at Conan Doyle & Sons because, on the day of our meeting he explained he was distressed about the very recent suicide of a friend's son and I deemed it inappropriate to ask to record the conversation in the circumstances. I brought a large (A2) printed copy of the map, some pens and masking tape to such meetings and we write new information directly onto them. In one case, the tape did not adhere so we pinned the map to table with cremation urns borrowed from a nearby display. The maps, of course, did not succeed in depicting the sociogenesis of firm figurations, but still they served important purposes.

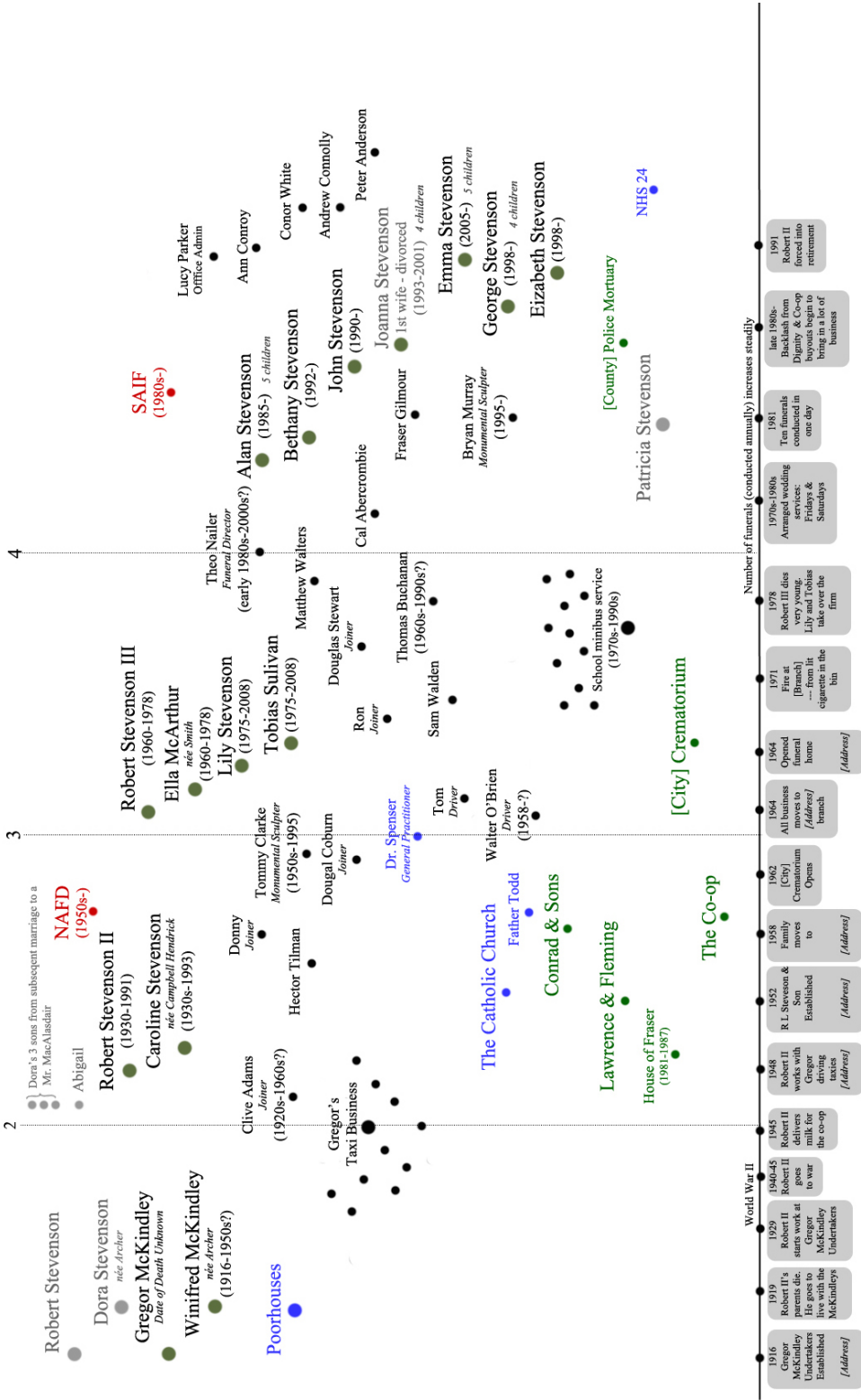
⁵ All firms referenced in this thesis were allotted pseudonyms based on classic fiction authors. I have chosen such 'household names' for pseudonyms for many reasons including that they share a persistence and familiarity; they have weight and they may be associated with things traditional. As discussed in the following chapter, independent funeral directors understand firm names as being highly important emblems representing their longevity and professional purpose.

At the outset, they provided the people I interviewed with a tangible reason why I had been asking about their firm's history and present-day dealings. As Morse (2010) notes, the addition of supplementary approaches can help researchers explore complexities they come across in the field; and likewise in visually depicting a network over-time via the maps, I was able to learn more about how people are organised within the firm in question and in what ways. In discussing the maps, various interesting stories were woven into the independent funeral directors' accounts of 'who worked when'. And as an added benefit, they gave many signs of prizing the quick references constituted by the maps, valuing them as potted information to have on file. As noted, funeral directors often take pride and interest in their firm's history. However, as the daily business of funerals is their primary concern they have little time for researching firm history; and so compiling information in this way served to reciprocate their engagement with my research (Rapley 2007: 23; Gray 2011/1980: 196; Bondy 2013), framed in terms of something they were keen to discuss.

The maps also provided an activity for us to do together and a reason to continue talking about the business. Gemignani calls for the 'active co-construction of data' in research settings (Gemignani 2014: 127; Ryan et al. 2014) and likewise the collective work on the maps encouraged the recollection of further matters of interest (Espinoza et al. 2014; Buckley and Waring 2013; Copeland and Agosto 2012). The funeral directors addressed obvious errors and gaps, often lapsing into related anecdotes and remembering additional associated people, and I asked for further or different information throughout this process. In conversations about the maps, I learned about many more aspects, events and people that they had not thought to mention before. The experiences around the maps also illuminated ideas about how relationships develop through research that is carried out over time, and that 'snapshot' kinds of enquiries are not the most helpful in exploring figuration.

With regard to specifics of the finished maps themselves, all the firms I interviewed had a main colour to their signage, website and business paperwork. As the maps became increasingly complex, a colour-coding scheme was developed to ensure that each person's place could be quickly seen. Two example maps of two family-owned firms are shown on the following pages.

Figure 1: R L Stevenson & Son



The maps illuminate the changing ‘shapes’ of the firms over time: some firms grew considerably in size, whilst others expanded slowly, a few kept a consistent number of employees and some shrank over time. R L Stevenson & Son (Fig. 1) is a comparatively small firm, with one branch and one offsite facility fitted with refrigerators and a chapel of rest. Their employee base has expanded somewhat over time, mainly owing to the previous generation producing a large family and that three of the four children and their spouses have joined the firm. Small-scale expansion of this kind was necessary in recent years because all competing independent firms in the area were gradually bought by the Co-operative Funeralcare and Dignity and, according to R L Stevenson & Son, customers locally preferred to patronise independent funeral firms. Conversely, O Wilde & Sons (Fig. 2) has expanded greatly over the past two generations, starting with two branches and developing into one of the largest independent firms in Scotland and possibly the United Kingdom. And more detailed accounts of these overtime changes are discussed in the following chapter.

Throughout the process of co-constructing, the independent funeral directors were more aware about the maps than I was. While I fixed on the ‘who worked when’ and ‘when did that happen’ aspects, they continued to tell me about both specific and broad changes with memorable stories and encounters interwoven across them. In other words, right from the very beginning the independent funeral directors were thinking about their activities and their understandings of them, rather than providing historical facts that would enable me to apply Elias’s ideas instead of using and weighing them in the context of my research. I thought they were misunderstanding me at the time and felt that the history was ‘not there’, or that they were keeping the history from me. However the independent funeral directors were not ‘doing it wrong’, and the prevailing problem was of my doing: I continued to slip back into applying and ideas about networks. Also, they used terms like ‘heritage’, ‘family’, ‘tradition’, ‘us’ or ‘our firm’. At the time I had a fairly literal understanding of Elias’s ideas and thus did not sufficiently appreciate that some of the ideas work differently in different contexts, or may not be useful in certain situations. I was using Elias’s writing in largely unquestioning ways and was confused when what the independent funeral directors said was rather different.

As such the maps did not do what I expected, which was to provide me with a viewable sociogenesis of a firm figuration with groupings of interrelated people visibly overlapping and intermingling across the timeline. When people try finding figurations by piecing together ‘facts’ in maps, they instead find long-term and short-term networks that are not always connected across time. However, they were still useful in the ways I discussed: they got people talking, and what they talked about led me to figuration.

V. Where Does This Leave Figuration?

In attempting to find where figuration ‘is’ and learn about its composition from the ‘real life’ interactions that composed my interviews, I repeatedly became aware that, in thinking about this, I kept slipping back into applying and into a kind of network analysis, as with the maps just discussed. Why does this happen? Firstly, why should I slip back into thinking in terms of networks? I would propose this happens because figurations are difficult to pin down, whereas networks are very pin-able. It is much simpler and more manageable to think in terms of ‘whom I know now’ and in terms of fragmented snapshots rather than un/evenly flowing interwoven threads. Stanley and Temple argue that ‘In life, telling is the basic means of social exchange, the to-ing and fro-ing of stories and accounts’ (Stanley and Temple 2008: 278). The gradual and developing character of relationships may be remembered through acts of telling, but largely in terms of one-off snapshots of ‘that one time’, ‘that funeral’ or ‘that mishap’. As such, people can explain their network/s, but not their figuration/s. As demonstrated with the maps, attempts at a representation results in a network. Perhaps the funeral firm figuration/s can still be found somewhere within these network maps, within and between the fragmented memories that people have.

Secondly and more fundamentally, why should I slip back into applying? This may be the case because the whole presumption of the education system in the United States where I was raised is predicated upon teaching people to apply what is taught to them. Of this Elias says, ‘no, people must think for themselves instead’, and he provides some ideas for people to use in their thinking. He also provides examples of how to go about doing this through his own case studies, encouraging future people to put ideas to use in whatever ways they may decide and for their own

purposes. This is an alien approach to many people, who are socialised into traditions of applying. Thus replicating is the easier option for many. My own earlier education taught me little aside from methods of repeating and regurgitating information, with critical questioning resulting in sanctions. The great ‘fathers’ of sociology, for example, were presented as if infallible gods who perceived the future and provided the following generations of scholars with theories that still work in contemporary applications. Students were not encouraged to find out if their sociological forefathers may have been incorrect, how the context in which they thought may have been different, or how their ideas work differently in different scenarios across time. Given this, it is necessary to engage in resolute struggles to overcome such practices in thinking in order to see beyond them. In other words, the ways in which many of today’s generation (including myself) were taught to learn are fundamentally discordant with what Elias suggests we do. And likewise in sociological research, the tradition of applying often manifests in approaches which dichotomise theory and method.

As mentioned earlier, theory and method have to mesh (Silverman and Marvasti 2008; Koro-Ljungberg et al. 2013). However by implication this suggests a categorical separation. In many cases, theory and method have been placed in separate boxes and, generally speaking, there is the inferred expectation of matching [theory A] with [method B] because predecessors have suggested they ‘go together’. One selects the first half of the puzzle, and continues searching for the corresponding half, as though context and temporality are not predominant factors in research projects. It perhaps goes without saying that notions of scientific replication are present in this. Elias (1970[2012]) is displeased with sociological research practices co-opted from the natural sciences and attempts to destroying this mythical opposition between theory and method by proving their interdependence – particularly in his work on involvement and detachment (1983[2007]) and his emphasis on process sociology (1970[2012], 1987[2010]). Perhaps a possible remedy to this disconnection between theory and method may be achieved by using different words: what I think, and how that changes and how I will find out more about what I wish to learn. These phrases immediately seem more reciprocal and interdependent than ‘theory’ here and ‘method’ there, and this pertains to the point

Elias is trying to make and which I am attempting to follow. The point is to allow theory-and-method to be guided by one's developing thinking and learning in the contexts of specific research projects.

This chapter has used Elias's ideas about figuration by grounding it in the practicalities of the research process I have engaged in. In doing so, I have weighed figuration and given it substance in substantive terms and this has led me to refashion it for practical use in exploring the developing everyday realities pertaining to British funeral firms. Applying Elias's concepts as-is would clash with social life and social interaction being complex, contextual and combining elements of stasis and change. Applying a conceptual schema will not teach researchers anything very much about social life. If such schemas are to be of real use, then this must involve re/thinking and re/working them on a case-by-case basis. As Elias and Dunning comment, their own '...conviction regarding the usefulness of a developmental approach has taken shape through the particular task of research itself' (Elias and Dunning 1986[2008]: 6). Having eventually learned how to go about it this way, I would argue that thinking with Elias's ideas involves re/thinking them in approaching and understanding different contexts and that this is a more useful way of doing sociological research. My thinking with Elias continues in the chapters following, with the analysis of research data starting with sociogenesis.

Carrying out practical aspects of doing the research has shown me how the core Eliasian idea of figuration can be used in orienting and questioning independent funeral directors' accounts of their work and firms and what changes they perceive. My struggle with not applying figuration in its abstract form has added specified substance to it. Elias writes about his ideas in general terms and also provides detailed case study examples of how he puts them to work, and these set the stage for future researchers to contextually rework what he has provided. In following in this Eliasian tradition and not applying, I have used his ideas here briefly concerning figuration. However there is more to 'getting the most' out of thinking with Elias than discussed in this chapter. I continue thinking with him in the following three chapters around other core Eliasian concepts – sociogenesis, habitus, and de/civilising processes – which were introduced in Chapter One.

Subsequent discussions are ordered in this way because, although all of the core Eliasian ideas discussed in this thesis are interrelated, each chapter builds upon the ones previous to it. Following from discussion in this chapter, Chapter Three builds on the Eliasian idea of sociogenesis to learn about how, in various ways, funeral firms stay in business for unusually lengthy periods of time. Having established some key ideas about the ways in which people are interdependently related in this chapter, the next chapter discusses how these interdependent groups develop within and in terms of one another in the *longue durée*. Following this, Chapter Four puts Elias's ideas about habitus to work in thinking about the differences and similarities within and between different funeral firms and how these have both changed and stayed the same over time. Habitus is explored following sociogenesis because habitus is a key example of what is shared within a figuration or figurations which develops over time and with changes perceivable as part of sociogenesis. Following this, Chapter Five focuses on Elias's central theory of the de/civilising process in presenting the 'bigger picture' according to the independent funeral directors and what they perceive as the main processes at work over the course of the past and present of funeral directing. This is both the journey and the destination for Elias, as de/civilising processes involve all the ideas discussed previously, but also help explain them further. As such, de/civilising processes are a kind of culmination to the thesis in terms of perceiving the interplay of ideas, people, contexts and change over time.

Chapter Three

Centuries in the Black: Sociogenesis and British Independent Funeral Firms

This business is about understanding the past and trying to visualise the future. You can't do one without the other (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Huxley 4.9.2014: 267-8).

'It is not very easy to make this movement clearly visible precisely because it takes place so slowly – in very small steps, as it were – and because it also shows manifold fluctuations, following smaller and larger curves. It clearly does not suffice to consider in isolation each single stage to which this or that statement on customs and manners bears witness. We must attempt to see the movement itself, or at least a large segment of it, as a whole, as if speeded up. Images must be placed together in a series to give an overall view, from one particular aspect, of the process: the gradual transformation of behaviour and the emotions, the advancing threshold of repugnance' (Elias 1939[2012]: 90).

I. On The Road with Sociogenesis

This chapter presents the next piece in the analytical puzzle that is my working out how to practically use Eliasian ideas in researching British independent funeral firms. In deciding on appropriate ways to explore and engage with the information amassed during the research process, I have come to understand the Eliasian approach as consistently engaged with figurations, but in an analytical sense beginning with sociogenesis. In building upon the previous chapter's discussion of following figuration, the present chapter is concerned with the long-term

development of independent firm figurations as this is perceived by the funeral directors currently working in them. In what follows I set off on the road of thinking with Elias again, with the discussion exploring four ways that independent funeral directors see themselves as keeping their firms in operation over the long term, and also discussing a somewhat different fifth way in which firms persist. The issue of why firms stay in business was a useful one in terms of sparking conversation about people's firms, but my intention here is not to explain why some firms last and some do not, but how this is seen. Following a discussion of Elias's ideas concerning sociogenesis, the chapter concludes by tracing synergies between the conceptual (Eliasian model) and the 'real life' (contextual) sociogenesis.

Having in the previous chapter explained the impetus for rethinking and reworking Eliasian concepts for use in context, this and the following chapters will put them to further use in discussing the everyday realities of independent funeral firm figurations as these were explained to me. As previously argued, an application of Elias's concepts as-is would waive the chance to critically think with Elias in the context of my own research setting, so my approach is one in line with Elias's strictures against abstract ideal types, and consonant with the methodological basis of process sociology. Ways of using and thinking with sociogenesis developed through my continual re-reading of Elias's work, as well as my continuing interactions with the independent funeral directors.¹ How I came to understand the ways in which sociogenesis 'works' (and does not work) were intertwined and bound together with the research process itself.

For Elias (1970[2012], 1984[2009], 1986b[2009], 1969[2006]) sociogenesis denotes society's un/planned and perpetual becoming, and therefore is a process which is predicated upon the overlapping and re/forming development of figurations over time. Sociogenesis thus denotes the movements – but not the directionality – of society over many centuries. Elias is always thinking in processual terms, with the sociogenesis of figurations being fundamental to his approach. This long-term focus also sets Elias apart from many social theorists, with Linklater suggesting that 'The focus on long-term perspective is one of the great strengths of Elias's processual

¹ These two factors also further developed the research questions outlined in Chapter Two, with the newer versions emerging over-time through this process of learning and re/thinking.

approach' (Linklater 2011a: 60). From a sociogenetic standpoint, society has no beginning and its development denotes long-term trends within and between the developing figurations comprising it along the way. Thus it perhaps goes without saying that when considering the long-term development of an industry, firm or any other kind of group, this is to trace the over-time changes within and between the involved figurations of people (Elias 2007a). Conceptually, thinking in sociogenetic terms encourages a processual understanding rather than one which pins down and reduces the un/even and unfolding essence of developing groups, institutions, habituses and so on. Also, and as already commented, the main events narrative approach is in practice too homogenising in the face of local diversities. Likewise and as commented by Benjamin (2007/1968), the 'history of the victor' approach which remains dominant in many accounts of the past similarly needs to be resisted. Historical accounts which depict one person or group changing the world are unconvincing when critically examined.

Turning away from these unsatisfactory perspectives and toward what makes more sense regarding my research, because process sociology categorically dispels 'the individual', and because the independent funeral directors I interviewed talked of their firms as interdependent and like-minded groups of employees working toward shared goals over time, sociogenesis takes on judicious and appropriate qualities for learning about the specifics and interwoven complexities of the long-term development in this particular context (Elias 1950[2007], 1969[2006], 1939[2012]). In helping bring to light innumerable complexities over the long term, sociogenesis also points up the kind of ordering that underlies 'historical change' (Elias 1939[2012]: 7, 1989a[2013], 1950[2007]), thereby providing a useful way of conceiving how matters of focus and concern come into being, persist or dissipate over time.

Although suggesting a sense of unfolding order, sociogenesis also rests on the assumption that social phenomena are always more disorderly and complex than they may initially appear. Hence sociogenesis can be perceived conceptually as concerned with the imperceptible processes of dis/order across time. The ways in which aspects of society develop over time are also bound up in the great colossus of broader shifts and developments and involve many un/planned processes at play within even the

least complex of figurations, occurring at different points across a processual continuum. Thus as researcher I should not endeavour to trim away the seemingly unrelated factors in my analysis, as this would be to hinder understanding ‘what is really going on’ in terms of the interwoven processes at work. Also there are probably many aspects which I will begin to perceive and appreciate only at a later stage in my work.

I am interested in Elias’s proposition that things are continually in flux, and think instead that some things may in fact remain more-or-less the same over long periods. Although Elias does note that some things change and some do not (Elias 1939[2012]: 445, 103, 479, 1970[2012]: 142), his conceptual descriptions and uses of sociogenesis do not give much credit to lingering elements of stasis within the over-time trends, and for obvious reasons. That is, his interest is in eradicating static ‘step’ views of social change, and so Elias is most concerned with elements in process. In arguing against step-wise changes and instead suggesting an intermingling of general over-time trends, Elias puts aspects of constancy to one side and argues that the un/planned qualities of group outcomes are such that no degree of uniform development in the ‘direction’ of either stasis or change can or should be expected (Elias 1939[2012]: 423). But mostly, his uses of sociogenesis are in the way of tracing changes.

In terms of professional figurations, Elias proposes that studies in a profession’s sociogenesis should not focus on the individual people who now perform vocational functions and enter into relationships with other people, but should instead be concerned with the changings situations and functions of the underlying relationships over time (Elias 1950[2007]: 27). I have already noted that Elias (1970[2012]) considers the whole to be more than the sum of its parts, and that professions persist beyond the lives of particular practitioners. It then follows that the functions and relationships involved make a profession ‘what it is’ at any particular point in time (Elias 1950[2007]). The ‘now’ profession builds on the past profession and its related relationships and social needs and is bound up within society at large. Considering the long-term development of the British funeral industry in these terms, its over-time figurational composition is noteworthy. This is because over several centuries the industry figuration continues to include tightly woven long-term

groupings of established funeral directing families, which Howarth (1997) argues eventuated as a quasi-profession and now help comprise a wider professional body known as the funeral industry. I should note here that throughout the process of thinking about sociogenesis and funeral firms, I wanted to draw on the literature referred to in Chapter One. However, I found that in practice some of the important ideas in it did not in fact help me unpack what the funeral directors told me and the concerns they expressed. For instance, funeral directors did not broach discussions of sequestration or ‘the good death’, or launch into the history of the trade in explaining their work. Instead they explained practical matters and group perceptions of the changes they experience. The literature set the scene in broad terms, but in fully understanding what the funeral directors told me I needed to follow their statements and explanations in my exploration of sociogenesis in practice.

Throughout my chasing the figuration, learning about ‘who they are’ as firms was imbued with comments about over-time persistence. Learning about the unfolding of independent funeral firm figurations necessitates understanding the organisation of prior generations in the business and, because these firms tend to be run by generations of a family, the part played by the family as well. In discussing Elias’s work, Gabriel and Mennell point out that ‘very little has been written about the related aspects of competition and co-operation in the concept of “generation”, and intergenerational processes’ (Gabriel and Mennell 2011: 6). Regarding independent funeral firms, every generation has contributed to keeping the business going, and the decisions made by succeeding managing directors or other people in charge have necessarily related to past decisions as well as influencing future ones. The aim here is not to select fragments showing this and mash them together, as Elias (1969[2006], 1983[2007]) argues that historians of his day often wanted to do, but to explore how today’s independent funeral directors are bound together in their particular stage of development and take into account the interweavings of past aspects of the continuum.

On a grand scale, all currently operating British funeral firms are similar in that they have persisted. However, Elias reminds readers that the contextual complexities involved should negate any idea that the development of firms has been uniform and that, anyway, development on any level is likely not to have followed a linear and

uni-directional pattern (Elias 1939[2012]: 103, 502). The point here is not to trace the uniform changes or myriad ‘directionalities’ of these, but rather to explore the range of factors contributing to persistence and with a primary interest in the ‘how’ of this. It might be assumed that all funeral firms will be able to stay in business because death is inevitable and business will therefore remain buoyant: the majority of people in Britain will eventually have a funeral, and as such, the business of funerals is recession-proof. This might sound reasonable, but it is also incorrect. After all, people continue to need food, but grocery stores still fold.

This chapter now turns to explore how the funeral directors understand how their long-standing independent funeral firms have persisted in business over long-term periods, for some of them several hundred years. Like other service industries, there are interdependent and intermingling figurations of people, network links, competition and changing customer interests involved – and of course a collective figurational interest in ensuring the firm’s continued persistence. The following section will explore four particular paths to longevity, as explained by four British independent funeral firms.

II. Sociogenesis, Four Ways

I have selected four of the independent funeral firms and what was told to me about how they have persisted over a long period for discussion here. I have done so to emphasise the multiplicity of sociogenesis in context, because these accounts show that the firms concerned have acted in concerted ways to ensure this. However, while each firm’s response has been unique, there are also key similarities between them. More broadly speaking, although those involved in these particular four firms gave especially full accounts of their longevity and of change over time, the briefer accounts from the other firms where I interviewed were broadly consistent but with their own specific differences. This of course agrees with some of Elias’s ideas about how things tend to proliferate in the long-term (Elias 1939[2012]: 422-7). They are some of the oldest firms, with their dates of establishment ranging from the 1880 to 1930. Through his studies of court societies and developing manners, state formation and de/civilising in particular (Elias 1969[2006], 1939[2012], 1989a[2013]), Elias demonstrates how sociogenetic processes are best (and possibly only) discernible

when considering long-term periods. Relatedly he also argues that ‘...[when] viewed in the context of the direction of long-term social development over the last two or three hundred years, they [relational matters of interest] are put in perspective’ (Elias 1970[2012]: 62). Thus in following Elias, I selected from the longest-standing firms where I interviewed.

These four firms are relatedly ones whose funeral directors conveyed the most about their firm’s longevity. And they highlighted longevity as a common and ultimate goal among independent firm figurations generally, as well as their firms specifically. More centrally speaking, the four firms stood out because of the ways in which their directors expressed ideas about longevity, persistence and change over time. When asked about how the firm had managed to stay in business for so long, all of the funeral directors began their explanations with the general comment that the firm had survived because it provides high-quality funerals to a community of loyal customers, while the descriptions of how the particular firms reacted to various past changes brought forward some important differences between them.

Regarding Conan Doyle & Sons, Julian presented the firm’s longevity in terms of an endless and frequently changing struggle to survive. For the firm, this has involved navigating the quickly changing currents of customer interests, and Julian emphasised the very real possibility of failure. Social changes were presented to me as if interrupting the ‘real’ work of funeral directing, and as things to be addressed before continuing on. As such, Julian’s accounts of over-time changes presented them as if issues and uncertainties to be dealt with, and more generally that the firms that persist are those that have been successful in addressing the problems as they arise.

The Stevensons explained R L Stevenson & Son’s survival in terms of maintaining a good reputation, something they are centrally concerned with. In recounting events surrounding the buying of their main independent competitors, the Stevenson family suggested the firm had already won the battle to remain in business. However, there were interspersed notes of doubt in their accounts, pointing up that if they are not careful the same fate will befall them. Customers may begin to favour a competing firm, thereby tipping the scales in the ‘direction’ of decline for the firm. R L Stevenson & Son’s directors emphasised the tenuousness of balances in

development: that the firm's situation can quickly change, but that its funeral directors do all they can to preserve the success they presently enjoy. Overall they conveyed that customers' opinions and choices are what allow firms to persist, for they all rely on a steady number of funerals to continue the business.

The Melville family presented H Melville & Sons' longevity in a detached way in suggesting that, if there are no funerals to arrange in the future, they as a family will take up a new occupation and the firm will continue on by means of different work. The directors at H Melville and Sons present over-time change as something inevitable that cannot be tampered with, and that these processes are simply a 'fact of life'. The Melvilles seem to view social change and its manifestations within their firm in terms of external forces acting upon them, and in the interest of survival all that funeral directors can do is to address these and move on. For H Melville & Sons, a firm's persistence relies on the ability to adapt sensibly and with the understanding that control over the changes that may arise is not possible.

O Wilde & Sons' development was explained in terms of replication. Although the firm expanded rapidly, Alex presented these ventures as being more of the same, rather than a process that differentiated its figurational composition; in opening new branches and buying existing firms, O Wilde & Sons 'reproduced' the firm. Alex explained social change as being secondary to proliferation, with proliferating firms ensuring their success regardless of what may change. With many branches, the weakening of one will not damage the whole. Thus for O Wilde & Sons, persisting is a matter of conquest and replication.

Within the interview settings, the conversations that occurred involved the people concerned explaining their lives and work, both regarding the firm and themselves as interlinked members working toward common goals. Elias argues that people can truly understand how institutional frameworks emerged and developed over time only by envisioning institutions as part of broader and increasingly complex network of interdependent relationships and also by learning about the continual and manifold challenges these face over the years (Elias 1950[2007]: 29). Pointing up challenges, one key topic which recurred across the interviews concerned the ways in which the different firms had stayed in business. The funeral directors explained their firms' longevity with undertones of pride, because they

have persisted when many others have not. How did they (the multi-generational ‘they’) manage this? The ways in which each firm has gone about staying in business have been numerous and in many respects also pertain to the particular geographical, figural and temporal situation each is in. That all these firms have persisted also unites them as successful in achieving this common aim.

My choice of pseudonyms for the independent funeral firms referenced in this thesis uses the names of famous fiction authors to denote each independent firm. Names of this kind are familiar and respected, have a perceived permanence to them and invoke notions of tradition and old-world values. And as I will discuss later in this chapter, the funeral directors prize their firm names and feel they represent their long-term struggle to preserve, persist and carry on. With this in mind, I shall now move on to discuss the four accounts of firm longevity as told by Conan Doyle & Sons, R L Stevenson & Son, H Melville & Sons and O Wilde & Sons. Although people from each of these firms explained to me that they have persisted because they provide quality traditional and bespoke services, are integral parts of their communities and care about their clients, there is more to it than this.

i. according to Conan Doyle & Sons

Conan Doyle & Sons is a fifth-generation independent family-owned and family-run funeral firm in a major English city. Julian, a managing director, explained that the firm had recently dealt with several sorts of challenges. Most are to do with the rapidly changing makeup of the local community, and as a result approaches had to be devised to address the funerary needs of each incoming ethnic group. In describing what he perceives to be ‘the beginning’ of the process of neighbourhood change, Julian notes that most of Conan Doyle & Sons’ traditional client-base gradually moved to a new city due to redevelopments:

Julian: It used to be that all our customers lived nearby, but the problem was that most of them moved to [City] – we opened [City] location because of that (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 145-7).

The gradual relocating of former customers left vacancies for many new neighbours and thus around the same time, a great number of African (country specified) people moved into the neighbourhood surrounding the firm's main branch:

Julian: Around the time the [African people] moved in, we opened a place in [African country]. Everyone thought we were crazy, but we found that a lot of the [Africans] wanted to be shipped back to Africa for burial, so we could take care of that. (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 180-84).

Julian: We do a lot of business in our [African country] location now. Also, it helps us earn respect with the local [Africans] – we have a place where they come from, and they like that. We've really increased our repatriation business in the last few years (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 210-14).

When many Asian people subsequently moved into the area surrounding Conan Doyle & Sons' main branch, firm members learned about Buddhist and Hindu funerary customs and added new facilities and services to address these:

Julian: We have to diversify to keep up with what people want. Otherwise we'll fail. I try to do all I can to make sure we can stay as we are but give the people around us what they want (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 262-5).

[Julian led me down the hall to the left of his office and showed me a memorial wall with flowers, cards, sweets, cigarettes, incense and food left at its base].

Julian: The Chinese believe that people have two souls – one here and one that goes on, so they leave things for the souls that are still here. *[He pointed to a cigarette skewered like a stick of incense in a sand tray on the floor].*

Julian: Someone brought a cigarette for their dad because he liked to smoke. *[Next, he opened a door to the left of the memorial wall to a washroom for Hindu burials].*

Julian: If they like to wash their dead themselves, there's a clean place for them to do it here. They used to have to go to some horrible back-alley place, but now we have this for them. *[There were hooks on the wall, and Julian pointed to them].*

Julian: We change the god [picture icon] depending on what the family wants. *[The walls were covered in thick rubber or linoleum to the ceiling, and there was a very sterile-looking metal table in the centre of the room with hoses extending overhead and cabinets to the right. He then led me across the hall, past the memorial wall, to a meeting room. There was a makeshift altar and a movable pulpit at the far end of the room, and doors leading outside at the other. Tables were placed on either side of the room].*

Emilia: This room is very versatile and can be used for mostly anything. *[Julian agreed, lifting up the tablecloth on one of the long tables to expose cutlery and dishes in a big cardboard box].*

Julian: Yes, we use this [room] for banquets too. *[He opened a door to the front garden and called my attention to a decorative water fountain and a small receptacle for burning things].*

Julian: We let them burn whatever [they want] out here (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 232-62).

More recently, many Muslim people moved into the neighbourhood adjacent to the firm's main branch. Conan Doyle & Sons has gradually made business links with their new neighbours, but doing so has been challenging for them:

Julian: This all happened in the past ten years or so: behind here the neighbourhood is all-Muslim now, and the issue is that their funerals are handled by the Mosque, so the business disappeared. We opened up a Janazah in that area – put a Muslim lady in charge. There are still a lot of problems but now we're getting some business. We've even had one or two funerals recently, so I think that's very promising. I'm very pleased with that result. We have a good reputation because we run a clean business – everything is so clean (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 164-72).

Amidst the challenges of a rapidly diversifying local community, the firm started a side-business to offset the decrease in funerals when many of the Muslims who had moved to the area did not want to use Conan Doyle & Sons for their funerals:

Julian: We also have an exhumation ‘side project’: a couple years ago, we got the qualifications and started exhuming bodies from some of the older graveyards in [the City, where required]. 5,000 bodies here, 13,000 bodies there; they’re building a new part of the [train] line, so we’re going to exhume another 5,000 bodies from the hospital’s old graveyard. It’s a good way to make some money when things get tight (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 216-23).

In explaining many influxes of new immigrant neighbours, Julian emphasised that whatever may change, tradition is still a key component in how Conan Doyle & Sons continues to do business:

Julian: My grandfather took over for Augustus [great grandfather] when he retired, and continued his community traditions. My grandparents would see some children wandering around without shoes, and they’d bring him or her into one of those second hand shops and buy them a pair. We try to continue this tradition of looking after the community by helping people where we can... The thing about the funeral industry is that it stays the same. Everywhere, funerals are as they have always been, the traditions stay, and people like it that way. The thing about [this area] is that it [funeral norms] changes all the time (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 133-9, 148-51).

Although Conan Doyle & Sons continue to uphold what they consider to be ‘the tradition’ of their firm, the area surrounding their premises has come to house different ethnic groups over the years. And in suggesting that their traditions have persisted intact, Julian implies that the firm only changes just enough in various unproblematic ways in order to get by, with their foundational age-old practices preserved across these comparatively short-term processes of accommodating various cultures. While Parsons (1999) notes the possible benefits of funeral directors addressing the specific needs and interests of niche markets in their communities, Conan Doyle & Sons basically considers this approach the only option for persisting in the present climate. Even so, Conan Doyle & Sons still sees some points of stasis in their persisting, and also them having some control over trends.

There are also elements of established–outsider relationships in this, with Conan Doyle & Sons having previously been an established group in the community as it had been, but now having to re-establish the firm with a succession of incoming groups (Elias and Scotson 1965[2008]). It has addressed these changes through a mix of opening new branches, expanding and tailoring its range of services, and endeavouring to remain an integral and known community business in spite of the changes. Also pointing up established–outsider relationships, Julian emphasises that by the firm embracing and accommodating the particular funeral customs of incoming groups, this increases the chance of arranging their funerals and so perpetuating the business.

Conan Doyle & Sons have taken many steps to address the funerary needs and traditions of incoming groups and integrate these into the range of services and facilities available. The result is that the firm's activities and its premises reflect the diverse cultural composition of the surrounding community, but in a complex way this is seen as secondary to the persisting traditional aspects of the firm and it remaining in business. Thus although Julian and other directors have started an exhumation business to cover costs when funerals are few, their primary concern is to keep Conan Doyle & Sons in business, which they seek to ensure by making good with local communities and giving their clients the best service possible, regardless of who the community may be at any given time. There is something of a contradiction here, for Julian emphasises that funerals 'stay the same' and 'funerals are as they have always been', although everything else he has said suggests the opposite. This is because, despite short-term changes, Julian sees the firm surviving by upholding matters of tradition. Although funeral firms must develop and accommodate what customers want, Conan Doyle & Sons does this he indicates by integrating this within their blend of long-standing British funerary traditions.

Julian Doyle's comments suggest the firm has evaded larger-scale change by preserving communal traditions through integrating these with discordant community customs. For example, Julian explained that, particularly for [African] funerals, Conan Doyle & Sons continues to provide traditional Victorian-era horse-drawn funerals, but have purchased a wide range of plumes and decorations and matching ties for funeral workers in the colours of various national flags and use these

whenever requested (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 120-22). In a sense, then, the firm is imposing elements of stasis into a developmental process which might otherwise have unfolded rather differently. Julian sees this constancy across the generations of Conan Doyle & Sons as essential, while also suggesting that the firm has persisted because its employees do 'whatever it takes' and make consistent efforts to provide what customers want and provide a diversifying set of services.

ii. according to R L Stevenson & Son

R L Stevenson & Son is a fourth-generation independent family-owned and family-run funeral firm in a Scottish city. I spoke with four members of the Stevenson family: Lily and Tobias (parents), and Alan and George (sons), who are all managing directors. Until about twenty-five years ago, there were many competing independent family firms in R L Stevenson & Son's area, and so they ran a number of side-businesses to make sufficient money. One of these was R L Stevenson & Son's taxi service, which dates back to the first generation of the firm in the 1920s, with the family having made more money driving taxis than arranging funerals until the early 1980s, and with the taxi service disbanding in around 1986:

Lily: Yes, but, as I said, as Gregor [her great uncle] got older, there was less and less business because my Dad wasn't there, and then when he came back in again, he concentrated mainly on taxis; also funerals if they were there, but it was mainly taxi work, and that... so he really re-established himself as an undertaker when he moved to – when they bought – eh, rented [Old Premises] (Transcript of Interview with L, A & T Stevenson 22.7.2014: 159-64).

In returning from the war to work as undertaker and taxi driver, Lily's father Robert further diversified his work in order to keep the funeral firm open and have sufficient income to live on.

Lily: ...But that was another side-line my Dad did was the monumental sculptors.
Alan: And the taxis – the taxis I mean was a huge business. For them, I mean. He did a hundred times more

taxi than he ever did funerals. And, as I say, with the school runs and them things and the taxi supplemented the fact that he wasn't doing enough funerals. In [this area] alone you would find that there's maybe 800-820 funerals – or deaths – a year, and back then – well when I started in '85 we were lucky to get 85 or 90 funerals that year – whereas now we do between 5 – and 600 a year and it's steadily increasing since I started – got busier and busier because our oppositions were bought over by —

Lily: — the multinationals (Transcript of Interview with L, A & T Stevenson 22.7.2014: 633-45).

Around the time Lily and Tobias started working at the firm, R L Stevenson & Son also ran a school bus service:

Tobias: And we used to do school runs... so there was a lot going with the part-timers after the 'noons – they'd work in the mornings —

Alan: — Drive a minibus or whatever, yeah. We used to do – drive the handicapped kids: pick them up, take them to school and then pick them up again and take them home from school – and we did the deaf school... [City 1], we went to [City 2] and things as well, and drove kids. It was a good way to make money

Lily: Well, it was your bread and butter because —

Alan: — steady money every month so it was a good way to sustain the rest of the business through that (Transcript of Interview with L, A & T Stevenson 22.7.2014: 390-401).

Diversifying further still, for a brief time in the 1970s the firm also arranged the details and transport for weddings:

Alan: Right – Oh yeah, we also did weddings.

Lily: We did weddings too by the way —

Alan: — on Fridays and Saturdays.

Lily: It was so difficult, because we needed somebody here all the time to answer the phones – it was difficult: the children were too small at that time, but we soon... when they got bigger, they were very good at answering the telephone [*chuckles*]... (Transcript of Interview with L, A & T Stevenson 22.7.2014: 857-63).

Lily, Alan and Tobias agreed that R L Stevenson & Son is still in business, not because generations of the firm have run various side businesses and made every effort to ensure its continuation, but mainly because it provides a quality, traditional service. And they feel the community increasingly patronises their firm for this reason:

Alan: It's a lot of funerals.

Lily: It is, yeah.

Alan: You're also busy for a reason; you're also busy because you give a good service to people, and if you didn't give a good service —

Lily: — They wouldn't come back.

Alan: You get a good reputation; reputation is a big part.

Tobias: It's personal, personal like.

Alan: Well, if you think that there are 800 deaths a year and we're doing 500 of them, that's a considerable chunk of the business (Transcript of Interview with L, A & T Stevenson 22.7.2014: 1075-85).

Alan: We give an old-fashioned service in a modern day (Transcript of Interview with L, A & T Stevenson 22.7.2014: 1122).

Lily, Alan and Tobias emphasised arranging funerals as central to their lives (Transcript of Interview with L, A & T Stevenson 22.7.2014: 834-6, 840, 1105-6) and in explaining their day-to-day activities it is notable that they do not separate home life from work life in any significant way. The firm has persevered by diversifying, while also providing quality funerals – giving 'a good service' and maintaining its hard-earned reputation. On one occasion in the early 1980s, I was told that R L Stevenson & Son directed ten funeral services in one day, although at that time the firm only had around four employees (Transcript of Interview with L, A & T Stevenson 22.7.2014: 1021-8). And once it dealt with four removals on Christmas Day (Transcript of Interview with L, A & T Stevenson 22.7.2014: 1090-1103). Keen local competition kept the number of funerals arranged per year low until the late 1980s, and so the family ran taxi, school bus and wedding planning services in order to make enough money. I was told they did this primarily to keep the funeral business going, and also to maintain a large family. When business

increased and provided too much work for the family members of working age, the firm hired part-time drivers in order to focus on funerals whenever there were some to arrange. As competition dwindled in the local area, they were asked to handle more funerals, and then hired more staff as needed. Currently this is five full-time family and eight non-family members.

The Stevenson family explained the firm staying in business in terms of giving a good service and, because of this, having a good reputation so that former mourners/customers 'come back' when further funerals are needed. The stress, then, is on 'old-fashioned service'. However, what is not stressed and seen as almost unconnected is that, more simply, all the other local independent firms folded, enabling R L Stevenson & Son to survive and to become full-time funeral directors for the first time since opening for business. As with Conan Doyle & Sons, there is the suggestion that through their autonomous actions as a firm figuration R L Stevenson & Son actively ensured the continuation of their firm. But had the competing firms not changed ownership, the present situation would probably be very different. Remembering Elias's (1970[2012], 1987a[2009]) ideas about intentional actions and un/intended outcomes, in buying the main local independent competitors, the conglomerate firms concerned did not intend and could not control what effects this had on R L Stevenson & Son's business. Despite the firm having made great efforts toward surviving, the independent actions of others also made their longevity possible, with both contributing to different extents.

There are also aspects of stasis in R L Stevenson & Son's explanation of its longevity, with their explanation seeing local area customers as always wanting 'an old-fashioned service', and with the firm always offering such a service. Relatedly, they saw the main reason the firm has recently been employed to do more funerals as being that it still keeps the traditions while competitors, because purchased by conglomerate firms, have abandoned them. In this way stasis becomes central to the firm's view of its survival, with the traditional values perceived as remaining constant and central to their continued success.

iii. according to H Melville & Sons

H Melville & Sons is a fourth-generation independent family-owned and family-run firm in a Scottish county town. I spoke with Horace and Angie and their son Clancy, who are the only three employees at the firm. This is an unusual setup not just because of the small scale, but also because contemporary family-run independent firms will often hire at least a few non-family staff members as needed. Although H Melville & Sons has arranged funerals for four generations, they were mainly building contractors until the 1980s housing market crash. After that, they focused efforts on funerals exclusively and continue to do so today:

Emilia: How did the you end up being only undertakers?

Horace: Well, the housing market collapsed. We were also joiners until about twenty-five years ago. Before then we had a lot of [contracting] jobs. Dad had about twelve joiners working for him (Fieldnotes of Interview with H, C & A Melville 8.7.2014: 51-5).

Chapter One noted how early funeral undertakers were often people from woodworking and related trades and that before funeral undertaking became an occupation, local joiners built coffins for deceased people in their communities (Litten 1997; Howarth 1997; Gittings 1984). Joinery has largely vanished from use among today's funeral directors, who point out that mass-produced coffins (often from China) can be provided more quickly and at a lower price than handmade ones. H Melville and Sons is the only firm I came across or heard about with recent experience in this, for although the firm has since converted its carpentry workshop into a chapel of rest, Horace is a skilled joiner and plasterer by trade. Another aspect which differentiates H Melville & Sons is that the firm is particularly small and has no particular interest in expansion. The firm employs three people, and now has two branches - one staffed and the other unstaffed:

Horace: ... We're all family – only family – here, it's just the three of us (Fieldnotes of Interview with H Melville 8.7.2014: 193-4).

Horace: ... We opened our new location in [nearby place] about three years ago, and now people know it's there because of the directory.

A celebrant over there said we'd never get a funeral the first year we opened because it's a big Co-op and Scotmid and Dignity area, but we got seven that year, and she did them all.

Emilia: Are there any staff there?

Horace: No because it doesn't make sense. If I were to hire someone, he'd be doing nothing most of the time. For the people who want to go to that location, one of us will get in the car and meet them there (Fieldnotes of Interview with H, C & A Melville 8.7.2014: 106-16).

Horace: ...It's just us [Clancy and him] and my wife working, and we haven't got anybody to help (Fieldnotes of Interview with H, C & A Melville 8.7.2014: 248-50).

What Horace neglects to say here is that they do not want to hire anybody to help, and would prefer maintaining their small business as it is. In addition to joinery and keeping the business a family one, H Melville & Sons also continues the long firm tradition of participating in local community events:

Clancy: We have participated in the parade for the [Holiday]. [*Clancy opened the door to the chapel, and Horace and I followed him through. Clancy led us to some framed photographs*].

Clancy: See, here are the floats we made. These are all the employees – my great grandfather [as a child], here's my grandfather [also a child, in the next photo].

Horace: See these? [*He indicated spirals on the floats*]. These are wood shavings! My grandfather's men spent hours getting that many. I think I've still got the tools somewhere. We covered it with wood shavings because we were joiners then.

Emilia: They're beautiful.

Horace: We participate in these things – partly because it's part of the job (Fieldnotes of Interview with H, C & A Melville 8.7.2014: 226-41).

Community events are certainly 'part of the job', but also part of continuing the legacy. The photos Clancy and Horace showed me depicted several previous generations of their family participating in a range of community events. While such events are probably not central to remaining among the established in a community

in the way they once were, H Melville & Sons does not seem to think it matters greatly, but what does is the continuation of traditions that previous generations engaged in. This is not ‘doing just to do’ but more ‘doing because grandfather did’.

In explaining their history, traditions and daily activities, Horace, Angie and Clancy impressed upon me that as a firm they take pride in their honesty and straightforwardness. Their comments implied a contrast with other funeral firms and the wider figuration to which they all belong. This of course points up some of Elias’s (1939[2012], 1989a[2013]) ideas about figurations having shared beliefs and behaviours, which will be discussed in the next chapter. From what Horace suggests below, H Melville & Sons’ honesty sets them apart from other members of the independent funeral firm figuration:

Horace: ...Nowadays people don’t care about the trustworthiness of their contractors... they just want a good price. Not like with funerals.

Emilia: [The switch to full-time undertaking] Isn’t that considered ‘late’ compared with other undertakers? I thought that most firms ‘switched over’ to undertaking toward the early years of their business.

Horace: Not in Scotland. You might find people who have always been undertakers in London, or people who gave up joining early on, but not here. If somebody out of London says, “We’ve always been undertakers”, they’re lying.

Emilia: Perhaps people [undertakers] are embellishing a lot of the time, for “established in 1800-something” sounds better than a more honest answer.

Horace: Well, we’re honest men. Honesty is a big part of this business. If something goes wrong, I’ll tell the family and pay for the mistake. You can’t make a spelling error [in obituaries], or it’ll be a £250 mistake in the *Scotsman* or a £550 mistake in *The Times*... and we can’t charge if there’s a mistake – we wouldn’t, and it reflects badly on us if we do (Fieldnotes of Interview with H, C & A Melville 8.7.2014: 55-74).

Horace explains the firm as a no-nonsense honest one dedicated to simple quality. In this, as a firm H Melville & Sons was not represented to me as having a profound mission to preserve itself, as some other independent firms put it to me. And

likewise, there was no explanation offered about why the firm has stayed in business for four generations apart from the co-existence of the contracting business. However behind this is the implied notion that H Melville & Sons' survival has been inevitable because the Melvilles continue to be known as 'the undertakers' in their community. And the further implication is that the absence of supporting detail implies that their profits are essentially earned by coincidence: mourners/customers recognise good work, and choose accordingly. However in other respects, their perception of how the business is kept operational is largely similar to that of other independent firms, in keeping good contact with the local community and observing tradition.

There are further implications in how H Melville & Sons was represented to me. While it may require more diligence per person, 'keeping things simple' and manageable with few employees and few branches also contributes to higher profits per person. A further unsaid factor is that the Melvilles prioritise work in accordance with whatever is presently lucrative: when building became less profitable the firm focused on funerals, and the Melvilles are likely to resume contracting work as the housing market recovers. Although people need to have an income and must ensure this with what available skills they have, perhaps the negative connotations of 'profiting from death' kept these things from being expressed.

iv. according to O Wilde & Sons

O Wilde & Sons is a fifth-generation independent family-owned and family-run firm in a large Scottish city and I spoke with Alex, a managing director of the firm. O Wilde & Sons was a very small operation until the early 2000s, when it greatly expanded through a combination of establishing new branches and acquiring other firms. When Alex's father David was managing director, the firm significantly expanded business to cover more of the areas where its long-term clients had moved, to secure continued patronage from them as well as acquire new customers in those areas:

Alex: ...People come from far out. I think the people who come to us want an independent firm. We have noticed that people tend to go to the director closest to them because they think they all do the same job [in terms of quality]. They think, "Why go so far when we've got an

undertaker's right here?"... So when we find that one of our locations isn't doing that many funerals anymore, we open more locations to get more business and that usually works (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Wilde 1.7.2014: 89-96).

A steady volume of funerals from new branches has ensured the continuation of the firm, but from Alex's explanations this seems secondary to arranging as many funerals as possible as a goal in itself. What Alex did not mention until the second interview was how quickly O Wilde & Sons had expanded:

Alex: Yes, okay, in David's day – when David started in 1973, the number of employees was probably about...ehm...three! [*chuckles*]

Emilia: [*laughs*]

Alex: There was David, and his Dad, Dave, and there was a lady – a receptionist lady.

Emilia: Okay, so there was just one other person – wow that was pretty small!

Alex: Yes.

Emilia: Okay so 1970s... that was it...then branched out after that.

Alex: Yes.

Emilia: And then, very quickly! You got all these people! [*I pointing to staff on the map I had constructed*]

Emilia: Yes, so basically it's really been, under David's service really that we've grown to this size.

Emilia: Right, right.

Alex: So, when David started, there was three employees, but when he finished there were seventy-five!

Emilia: Gosh, wow, that's really something...

Alex: Because, we, we, in the 2000s we opened further locations and we actually purchased some other businesses as well.

Emilia: Okay, so you have – what was it – 11 or 12 locations now?

Alex: Well, it depends. Right – under the name of O Wilde we do, but we have bought other companies – not in [City], in other parts of Scotland, and we've kept their family names on the – over the door (Transcript of Interview with A Wilde 24.7.2014: 131-59).

The practice of keeping a family firm's name after purchasing it is, according to the other independent funeral firms, a dishonest practice generally associated with conglomerate firms. I will discuss this later, but for now note that it is surprising that O Wilde & Sons, or perhaps just Alex, does not take issue with retaining a name and reputation they did not have a hand in preserving, when as a firm it has striven to preserve its own name for five generations. Perhaps because this expansion, according to Alex, happened without a hitch encouraged this perspective.

Unlike some other older independent firms, O Wilde & Sons does not appear to have engaged in side-businesses for survival. However, seemingly for reasons of prestige rather than necessity, O Wilde & Sons has opened an embalming school:

Alex: You know, I'll tell you what: you know the other significant thing that's happened? We opened an embalming [school], and we opened the embalming [school] in [year]? Might have been [year] – We opened an embalming [school] where other funeral directors come to us to learn how to embalm, and Mandy and Burt – they are [our] embalmers, so they run that.

Alex: ...we are fully booked all the time. We do one-to-one tuition, so people will only take one student at any one time – we do one-to-one, so we don't have a group full of ten students: we feel that it should be one-to-one tuition so we can really focus on that one person and show them how it's all done.

Emilia: I think that's probably better. I mean, it's really delicate work...

Alex: Yes, and as a result we're fully booked (Transcript of Interview with A Wilde 24.7.2014: 552-70).

This is about prestige, for other firms will say their embalmers were trained at O Wilde & Sons, and this will continue to reinforce their reputation of being the 'top choice' in the city and surrounding areas. Another aspect which helps support the firm's prestige is that O Wilde & Sons claims to arrange funerals for many generations of repeat customers, having worked in the same closely-knit area for over a century, and with people still using their services after moving away:

Alex: ...This used to be a community back then – all families – now it's all students. Back then, everybody knew everybody. We get some

people coming in whose parents and grandparents used us. When this area became all students, we find that people come to us from further out. (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Wilde 1.7.2014: 82-6).

Alex represented to me a two element explanation of the firm's survival. Until recently, O Wilde & Sons stayed in business by keeping operational costs low. And with just three employees, one hearse and one small premise, few funerals were required per annum to keep the firm in business. However, the large expansion under his father was a major change, and will ensure its longevity for some time to come. O Wilde & Sons is now a famous name in the area's funeral directing networks and several other interviewees mentioned them to me as a 'top choice'. It is unclear, however, whether this is the result of the fairly recent expansion and increased visibility, a longer-term established reputation, or whether there are also other factors at play. Discussions with Alex left many gaps in my understanding of what tradition means to this firm, although the ways in which they go about their daily business seems in line with the other long-standing independent firms where I interviewed. I was left with the feeling that Alex did not care much about the changing group work aspects of the firm, with him continually returning to stories of particular male ancestors and what they had done individually. Perhaps also he was trying to explain in terms of what he thought I was interested in.

Like the Melvilles, Alex provided no explicit explanation as to the longevity of O Wilde & Sons, although I did ask on several occasions and in different ways. From what was imparted he thinks that, although the firm was very small and relied on persisting local community ties to ensure a steady number of funerals, the survival of the firm was 'challenging, but inevitable' because O Wilde & Sons' are known locally as 'the undertakers' and having expanded they are now known more widely as such. What continues to puzzle me is that the firm's quick and wide-ranging expansion greatly resembles that of Dignity's in the 1990s, but the other independent firms have not mentioned this or perhaps do not view it in these terms. It is possible that, since O Wilde & Sons is a fellow independent firm, survival by any means is permissible. The purchased firms will remain part of an independent firm, albeit a different one. This us-versus-them mentality is highlighted across many

interviews, and brings forward aspects of firm habituses which are shared between many independent funeral directors, something discussed in the following chapter.

When broadly contrasted, the funeral directors from R L Stevenson & Son and Conan Doyle & Sons have emphasised elements of struggle in their firms' quests for persistence, while those from H Melville & Sons and O Wilde & Sons have downplayed these. However, thinking about the firms on a case-by-case basis illuminates that each is characterised by having undergone specific development processes which sets them apart from the others. Conan Doyle & Sons is distinctive given the firm's location surrounded by continually changing varieties of incoming groups. R L Stevenson & Son is situated within a closely-knit community where there were previously too many competing independent firms and not enough funerals to share between them. H Melville & Sons is unique in not emphasising a calling to funeral directing work, but nonetheless seeking to exemplify some of the 'traditions' that have largely been discarded in the present-day funeral industry. And O Wilde & Sons has successfully achieved rapid and large-scale expansion. Considering the firms together, it also becomes clear that all of them have engaged in processes of continuation closely linked with their unique earlier histories and present circumstances.

v. pattern and legacy

So far I have discussed ways in which four independent firms' persistence has been explained (and not explained) to me. Having discussed the variations across them, considering the four accounts together suggests that diversifying through side-businesses, adding branches, maintaining or creating ties with the customer-base and providing quality goods and services are seen as important factors in ensuring continuation. With so many intermingling elements at work, there are no simple answers. However at the local level and these particular firms, some key factors in ensuring longevity seem to be responsiveness in managing changing circumstances and quick thinking on the part of particular funeral directors along with close attention to community composition and customer behaviour. As funeral firms are businesses and businesses need to make money, providing quality services and having good community relations are of course associated with the longevity of

small business in any sector. However particularly with regard to independent funeral firms, the independence and longevity of the firms seem to involve more than being a source of income, and also be a kind of legacy.

This legacy seems for all the firms to hinge on preserving ‘tradition’ and ‘traditional’ values, whatever the specific practices may be. What are the origins of traditions, what are they at present, and how do they develop in these contextual settings? There are repeated factors perceivable over time, although the forms these take seem tied to any given present. For example, Julian of Conan Doyle & Sons mimics his grandparents’ tradition in buying shoes for shoeless children by paying for a local woman’s rail fare to see her ailing daughter in hospital (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 137-47), and Horace and Clancy Melville of H Melville & Sons drive in their town’s annual festival (Fieldnotes of Interview with C & H Melville 8.7.2014: 211-26). Are these things an important part of the job, or more than that? Tradition does not seem to be a static thing transferred from the distant past into a succession of present-day environments, but is rather constructed in the present to act as a rationale and motivation in explaining the firms’ survival.

As Berman (1988) comments, modernity is often perceived as at odds with tradition, with each age claiming to be ‘modern’ in a different way. The same is true of tradition, which is conceived according to the prevailing beliefs, behaviours and practices of the present. This is not to say that ‘tradition’ or ‘modernity’ are disjointed from previous and subsequent periods, but rather that people’s perceptions of what is traditional are at basis presentist, for people re/conceive supposedly long-standing practices in terms of their everyday lives. Hobsbawm influentially explains that “‘Traditions’ which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented... ‘Invented tradition’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past’ (Hobsbawm 2013/1983: 1). Although many independent funeral firms have traditions which undoubtedly have some roots in earlier periods, it is often impossible for the funeral directors to pinpoint ‘what came from where’ and ‘what has developed’ through use over time, and for that matter they are not interested in such an exercise in locating origins.

While some of their traditions are likely to be entirely invented, others are practices put into use by a recent previous generation and are observed by the one, which considers the tradition in question to have always been in use.

However, the realities and origins of traditions are secondary for them. What is primary is the suggestion of permanence that engaging in these traditional practices helps to exude: they are legitimising and promote a sense of distinctivism and superiority within funeral firms (Hobsbawm 2013/1983: 10). Apart from this, they do not actually care to know the origins of traditions in specific terms. The funeral directors do not seem to register whether the traditions they engage in are indeed long-standing ones or not; what they are concerned with is whether they feel and appear to be such. While dates and historical ‘facts’ do not add much, their enactment reinforces habitual norms, underscores in-group belonging and projects the appearance of long-standing values ‘outward’ to customers.

As Hobsbawm (2013/1983), Berman (1988) and Hammer and Lewis (2007) discuss, traditions play out in practices developed through group interaction, in actively choosing which elements are combined in co-constructing tradition. On this: Hobsbawm points out that ‘Sometimes new traditions could be readily grafted on old ones, sometimes they could be devised by borrowing from the well-supplied warehouses of official ritual, symbolism and moral exhortation – religion and princely pomp, folklore and freemasonry’ (Hobsbawm 2013/1983: 6). Likewise Hammer and Lewis note that what is ‘Common to a wide variety of cases of invented traditions is the fact that the actual processes of human agency, as recoverable, for instance, through historical-critical research, are overlaid with a historiography that confers legitimacy to religious claims and practices’ (Hammer and Lewis 2007: 4). While these and similar examples emphasise people’s intended actions, Elias might respond that processes of re/forming and inventing tradition rise out of figurational interaction and are predicated upon the sedimented habitual layers of these. I will return to how the funeral directors’ use such invented traditions to reinforce the sense of their firms having permanence later. For now it suffices to say that selling the firm or going out of business would mean a failure to preserve the passed-down (as if intact) tradition and legacy of many generations of a family, and so the traditional, hardworking independent funeral director works tirelessly to avoid

letting the ancestors down and being the one who will be remembered as ‘causing’ the business to fail.

From the accounts of the independent funeral directors I spoke with, they consider firms which have been sold or which have disbanded to be decisive failures and firms which employ progressively fewer family members as weakening:

Horace: ...The other thing is, lots of “family” firms only have about one family member left. It’s just Ted over at Orwell’s... [he also gave another example of a firm and person I did not recognise] (Fieldnotes of Interview with H Melville 8.7.2014: 191-4).

Despite many independent firms calling themselves ‘family’ firms, few are presently run by the family, and even fewer are run entirely by family. Having all or mostly family members running the business is not only a legitimising factor, but also the difference between a marketing ploy and a continuing tradition. Through our interview, Horace and Clancy repeated that most funeral directors say one thing, but do another. Keeping a family business independent, cohesive and running is a tall order even within one generation, and Horace seemed to imply that it is not only a failure to have few family members in the business and call it a ‘family firm’, but also that all-family run firms are a point of pride and a mark of success in continuing the long-running tradition intact. The process of persisting risks deterioration and this must be combated wherever possible.

By way of introducing a ‘fifth way’ of a funeral firm persisting, it is necessary to point out that, in situations where a family firm has been in business for centuries, it is easy but incorrect to assume this suggests figurational continuity. In Eliasian terms, over-time development is more complicated and divergent than that. In what now follows, the buying and selling of firms is treated as part of sociogenesis. This fifth way is discussed separately because it is a more analytical way of thinking about figurational persistence, while the preceding four are about the continuity of particular firms in particular ways. While the funeral directors I spoke with in effect discounted the selling of a firm as a form of longevity, it is clear that the sale of a firm is a continuation albeit in a different way. It is a way in which a previously unrelated firm can take over, continue and make profits. And while the firm that is

sold will not continue in precisely the same way as before, it will still have some continuity.

III. A Fifth Way

In talking with me, the funeral directors I interviewed used terms including ‘bought up’, ‘bought over’, and ‘buyout’ to describe situations where firms decide to sell ownership to another firm. If this happens, the purchasing firm might choose to start again from scratch with new staff, or require that certain previous members of staff should remain after a firm changes ownership. However, the firm’s name is rarely changed. Independent funeral directors seem to interpret the sale of a firm as the antithesis of survival because they perceive it as the end of a legacy, but is this really so? The Eliasian view is that a figuration undergoing sociogenesis will have some organisational aspects continuing over the course of its perpetual developing. However, this does not seem to hold here: the firm may change quickly and drastically in character, and so the question of how it should be considered in terms of sociogenesis must be dealt with. Conceptually speaking, the particular people in a figuration will change and particular figurations will persist or dissipate over time, but this process still amounts to a sociogenesis of figurations over the long-term. Even where firms are bought and thereby a range of factors change, this is still a kind of long-term development: the buying and selling of firms serves as a means of persisting when considered in the terms of the purchasing firm, the continuation of the firm’s name, and continuing jobs for any remaining staff.

In Britain, the independent firms seem to largely to understand Dignity and the Co-operative Funeralcare (hereafter referred to mainly as ‘conglomerates’) as the culprits in this process. These have developed into conglomerates over the longer-term, although Dignity founder Howard Hodgson grew up in an independent firm founded in 1850 (Hodgson 1992) and sees Dignity in persistence terms, while the Co-operative had its origins in a radical alternative to exploitative practices.

Although these large conglomerates are most often mentioned in conversations about firms being bought up, independent firms also sometimes buy others in the process of expanding, as with O Wilde & Sons noted earlier. Collectively speaking, although independent funeral directors tell the story in terms of a ‘big bad wolf’ encroaching

on their ability to thrive and persist as independent businesses, both independents and conglomerates are involved in buying and selling as part of keeping their own firms in business and profitable. Perhaps the contention surrounding the buying of independent firms has to do with the development being perceived as ‘forced’ from the outside, an accompanying rapid rather than incremental pace of change, and the reminder of effective competition. In addition, and perhaps most pertinently, a firm being bought stands for a family/business having failed, the bought firm’s tradition being lost, and the reminder that others could follow.

The selling of firms happens for a number of reasons. Arthur, formerly involved with different firms and different types of firms and now of the National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF), for instance, said to me:

Arthur: You get buyouts when you have a son who doesn’t want to take over the business... and then the combines start sniffing around
(Fieldnotes of Interview with A Huxley
4.9.2014: 28-30).

Ted, managing director of G Orwell Funeral Services, a third generation family-owned firm, and who Horace mentioned earlier, said something similar, in explaining:

Ted: The thing about third generation firms is that there aren’t many of us.
Emilia: Why do you think that is so?
Ted: Well, with the second generation, kids who grew up in the business, you usually have someone who works and someone who wants. You know, someone lazy who just wants the rewards bit of everything, but doesn’t want to work for it. That’s when firms get sold: when the person who wants gets the best of things
(Fieldnotes of Interview with T Orwell
30.6.2014: 176-84).

Dignity recently approached G Orwell Funeral Services, wanting to buy the firm so that it would become a franchise:

Ted: ...So it was that, my Dad’s death, and a few other things that did it. The family was talking about selling to SCI – well, Dignity I guess they’re called – but I’ll be damned if SCI doesn’t still have a quarter of the shares. So Dignity drew up an evaluation and, with me

locked in for ten years, the firm is worth X amount, and without me it's worth zero. So I paid the family what it was worth with me staying on, and we stayed independent (Fieldnotes of Interview with T Orwell 30.6.2014: 188-95).

C Dickens & Sons has experienced something similar. Carl, who had recently taken over as managing director of the small firm, was not previously interested in continuing the family business. As he was an only child, his father had intended to sell until Carl changed his mind about this. Carl explained that he strives to preserve the firm's independent status although the conglomerates continue asking about a sale:

Carl: Yes. [Conglomerate firm] calls about once a month, asking to buy us. I said, "No... I don't want to sell my firm" (Fieldnotes of Interview with C Dickens 6.6.2014: 84-8).

Carl: There aren't many independents around anymore [in the area] – All sold now. Not us, though (Fieldnotes of Interview with C Dickens 6.6.2014: 99-101).

As noted previously, in the accounts given to me the proposed sale of a firm is associated with the decomposition of its figuration. Family members and staff may retire, die or choose not to continue the business, and this provides an opportunity for new people and outside firms to fill the void. However, not every firm is desirable as an acquisition. Firms can fold, and there may be bad debts and other such factors to consider. And for those buying, the process of deciding which to purchase involves many calculations:

Emilia: How did you all pick which branches to buy?

Arthur: Well, it has a lot to do with local figures: how many funerals they do a year, what sort of overheads they have, how much bad debt they're carrying... and then you have to look at the surrounding area – who lives there [ethnicities], age stats. How many people you think are going to die in the next decade... There are more complicated aspects, like how the area might change. In some cases you shouldn't buy a branch for a while – should wait and watch. Another big bit of being in this

business is understanding the changes in cultures living near your firm (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Huxley 4.9.2014: 75-86).

Arthur's explanation focuses on the immediately local, but as Alex pointed out, customers are sometimes willing to travel. Arthur's comments also assume that trends will continue in the same 'direction', with many soon-to-be-dead elderly people in a neighbourhood equalling a known number of funerals over several years. There seems to be two main ways in which expanding firms decide on which firms they would like to buy. One is to continue relying on such calculations but to outsource this work. Nolan, a managing director at the large independent firm of Joyce & Hardy, explained:

Emilia: So, you said there have been four new branches since you opened. How do you pick where to put a new branch?

Nolan: It is very scientific. We hire a company to do an analysis – we look at local death rates, and see where they will peak in 5-10 years. That way, we have a name in that community by the time lots of people need a funeral (Fieldnotes of Interview with N Hardy 18.7.2014: 209-14).

The other is to buy firms with the long-term aim of gaining representation in every area:

Arthur: You have to know your area, and you have to learn about them [customers] so you can give them what they want. The new guys [at conglomerate firms] don't understand that, really. Now, it's not really like that at all. They think, "Oh, we don't have one there [in that area]" and just buy a branch based on that (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Huxley 4.9.2014: 94-9).

This is similar to what Alex explained to me about O Wilde & Sons opening new branches in local areas where the firm is not getting many funerals per annum (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Wilde 1.7.2014: 89-97). He mentioned in the second interview with him that some of these in fact involved pre-existing independent firms which O Wilde & Sons had purchased:

Alex: Because, we, we, in the 2000s we opened further locations and we actually purchased some other businesses as well (Transcript of Interview with A Wilde 24.7.2014: 151-2).

Some independent firms are buying other independent firms in their quest for expansion and thereby persistence. Perhaps Dignity and the Co-operative Funeralcare are blamed for buying up independent firms because they are perceived as doing it more frequently. However, if this was not so the independent firms would probably devise other reasons to blame them based on their ‘outsider’ status, and that they are now the main competition. Mentioned earlier, one key issue which the independent funeral directors commented on about buying firms is that the purchasing firm normally does not change the name of the firm purchased:

Clancy: Yes, and what annoys me is that the Co-op and Dignity get to buy up family firms and not have to change their names.
 Horace: I hear people say, “Oh, I went to Whatever & Sons because my family always went there”; and it’s a Co-op branch now and they have no idea. Well, they should; they have the Co-op logo on the bottom of all the forms, but they get to keep the name! They didn’t make that name! (Fieldnotes of Interview with H, C & A Melville 8.7.2014: 161-8).

In 1995, the Office of Fair Trading’s annual report contained the sentence, ‘The MMC was also concerned, among other things, about...the ultimate ownership of funeral directing outlets’ (OFT 1995: 35), but nothing substantive has been done since by the Monopolies & Mergers Commission (MMC)² or OFT (both now defunct) or any other consumer interest group.

But while firms’ names have been explained to me as sacrosanct emblems of tradition and longevity, and although the buying of names has been blamed largely on conglomerates, independent firms doing the same thing are not blamed:

Emilia: Okay, so you have – what was it – eleven or twelve locations now?
 Alex: Well, it depends, right. Under the name of O Wilde, we do, but we have bought other companies – not

² The Monopolies and Mergers Commission (MMC) became known as the Competition Commission (CC) in 1999.

in [City], in other parts of Scotland, and we've kept their family names on the... over the door
(Transcript of Interview with A Wilde
24.7.2014: 153-8).

It is clear that independent funeral firm's names are seen to be made and earned over-time and have considerable symbolic importance. Behind the name, they are characterised in an idealised way by the idea (if not always the actuality) of long-standing customer-families and families of funeral directors within a closely-knit community. The name over the door and the associated family surname are thus markers of legacy, tradition and habitus and long-term figurational perseverance. The family, over generations of continued hard work, has kept that name 'good' – something I will discuss at length in the following chapter. When an independent firm is bought, dismay over trading on a firm's name that has not been 'earned' is understandable, in the sense that the long-standing relationships with the local community and the legacy of the name were not on sale, but in a sense have been taken. However, this is not actually the source of the response or else it would also be levelled at O Wilde & Sons and other expansionist independent firms, and it is not.

When a firm is bought, especially if it was a prominent firm, former customers sometimes fail to notice the change in ownership at all, as earlier I noted Horace pointed out. But nonetheless it is a common assumption among the funeral directors I interviewed that most former customers will not continue arranging their funerals with a firm after it has changed ownership. In some areas, I was told that this is especially so where a firm has been purchased by Dignity or the Co-operative Funeralcare, although this may be the surmise (or hope) of the people I interviewed about the reasons for customer choices. The sale of many firms in an area can also contribute to the success of independent firms that have not been sold. As alluded to earlier, for R L Stevenson & Son the change in ownership of their main competitors meant a boom in business for them:

Alan: Lawrence & Fleming and Conrad's – was there anybody else? No, it was just the two.
Well, the Co-op.
Lily: Oh I forgot the Co-op, yeah.
Tobias: Bought over by the multiples.

Lily: Yeah,
when they were bought over by the multiples,
like, you know, it was like, ehh, I can't
remember; it was a guy, Hodgson.
Alan: Howard Hodgson.
Lily: Howard Hodgson, private
business undertaker —
Alan: — House of Fraser was the
first one to take over [Conrad's]. House of
Fraser bought them, Plantsbrook, Howard
Hodgson and then eventually SCI, and then
Dignity.
Lily: That made an awful big difference to
our business, because we got extremely busy.
Extremely. Soon as people got to know that it
wasn't a family business, they immediately-
our business just got so much —
Tobias: — [Area] people
are very, ehm —
Lily: — They're quite traditional, you
know? And as soon as they found out... [R L
Stevenson & Son got most of that business]
(Transcript of Interview with L, A & T
Stevenson 22.7.2014: 646-65).

Similarly, according to H Melville & Sons the purchase and change in ownership of the well-known E Spenser & Son sent business to O Wilde & Sons, which has recently grown into the largest independent firm in the city:

Horace: E Spenser & Son – you know them –
over in [City], used to be the 'top' choice. They
had the Rolls Royce hearses and all sorts of
horses, and all the posh [City] people went
there for their funerals so they could tell
everyone they used Spenser's... but they were
sold to the Co-op and now I guess people
caught on because O Wilde is now the big one
(Fieldnotes of Interview with H Melville
8.7.2014: 184-9).

The buying and selling of independent firms seems to have reinforced the view among independent funeral directors that their family businesses are preferable to conglomerate ones, and it has also legitimised animosity toward both Dignity and the Co-operative Funeralcare, who are identified as the source of conflict (often mistakenly). From interviews, there is the shared view that defenceless independent firms are sold against their will or pressured into this. But this is not the case, as a purchased firm will need to agree with the proceedings. In discussing events

pertaining to the MMC and the National Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF), which guard against conglomerate monopolies and protect independent funeral firms in Britain, Sloan at W Shakespeare & Son took a different stance:

Sloan: They [the MMC and SAIF] stop companies that want to be bought from being bought. It's stupid! If a company wants to be bought up, don't they have a right? I mean, this is absolute rubbish.

Emilia: Would you agree that it's sort of patronising as well?

Sloan: Oh yes. As though we can't make up our own minds for ourselves. We've been around longer than them. And they come in with their numbers and their reports and mess with things (Fieldnotes of Interview with S Shakespeare 4.6.2014: 190-98).

Sloan's approach is in contrast with what most people said to me: that it is 'unfair' or 'unjust' for firms to be bought and sold. But conglomerate firms continue to expand, and the remaining independent family firms will probably continue to disparage this and blame the conglomerate 'outsiders' for wider changes, and the habitus of the British independent funeral directors' figuration is being reshaped around these and related factors, something discussed in the following chapter. While the collective anger regarding the buying and selling of firms is expressed particularly towards the retention of the original firm name, none of them points the finger at other independents for such transgressions. Perhaps less surprisingly, the independent firms who have benefited from the buying of formerly independent firms to Dignity or the Co-operative Funeralcare do not display such outrage toward the conglomerates. Alex at O Wilde & Sons, for instance, commented on a three-generation long working relationships with an area firm that is now a Dignity branch, noting that its purchase had not made any difference because providing the best funerals is more important to any good funeral director than corporate rivalries (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Wilde 1.7.2014: 224-52). And similarly, George at R L Stevenson & Son has remained friendly with a director at a nearby Dignity branch and has benefited from the sale of their competition to Dignity (G Stevenson to E Sereva, 25.9.2014, Email Communication).

Obviously a sale can be seen as a kind of ending. At the same time, the buying of independent funeral firms provides a continuation both for the purchasing firm, and for the purchased firm and its name. The sale of a firm can mean both failure and a chance for continuation, and also increased or decreased competition for surrounding firms. Here, circumstances are unique to each particular sale, and affect the dynamics of surrounding funeral firms in varying ways. While sociogenesis is not concerned with individual practitioners, or the persistence of one particular organisational entity over time, longevity is to do with these for it pertains to the long existence and persistence of a particular person or entity — in this case, an independent funeral firm.

IV. Sociogenesis for the Asking

When asking questions I thought would illuminate the sociogenesis of a firm, the funeral directors responded with information about longevity. Firstly, the interviewed funeral directors were very we-centred in their explanations of how their firm — as a separate and seemingly independent entity — had managed to remain profitable or stay in business. Secondly, the funeral directors I spoke with seem to equate success with persistence and constancy. Although changes must be made in order to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse pool of could-be customers, there was an overarching stress on keeping the ‘tradition’ alive, maintaining things as they were and had always been. This raises some important points regarding the differences as well as overlaps between longevity and sociogenesis. I had previously considered longevity to simply be a subset or even a synonym of sociogenesis, but have since reconsidered this. Within sociogenesis, longevity seems to be the collective aspects that appear to have stayed more-or-less the same within a firm: that they are still in business, their values persist and they uphold the tradition. Longevity seems to be the stasis counterpart that makes sociogenesis appear un/changing, rather than considerably in flux, although I do not wish to reduce these to an either/or binary relationship.

Longevity is perhaps more discernible in the accounts of independent funeral directors because it is easier to pick out things that have seemingly stayed more-or-less the same. Elias notes that gradual changes of the sociogenetic variety take place

over ranges of time extending beyond the lifespan and memories of particular people. Sociogenesis is imperceptible to living people and mainly discernible to researchers undertaking retrospective projects. This suggestion is of course based in what Elias (1939[2012]) implies: that sociogenesis is only truly perceivable over the *longue durée*. Although many independent funeral firms have been in business for generations, the degree of detail present in the stories of the long-past pales in comparison with the accounts of the now-past in the descriptions and explanations of the funeral directors I interviewed. People's lives are finite, and in this context the long-past is only available in oral or written accounts and in particular via the recounting of passed-down stories in which the speaker played no part.

Olick and Robbins comment that 'History is the remembered past to which we no longer have an "organic" relation — the past that is no longer an important part of our lives — while collective memory is the active past that forms our identities' (Olick and Robbins 1998: 111). In the context of funeral firms, the history exists only in the collective memory of members of a family figuration and from their accounts I expect its members would consider the history to be an important influence in their daily lives. However, they do not seem to know any of the history well. Although Gabriel and Mennell argue that 'because people see themselves as isolated individuals independent from others, they find it difficult to see their interdependence' (Gabriel and Mennell 2011: 8), the funeral directors did explain things in We-I terms when relating the present and the everyday; it was their stories of the long-past with which they had no direct individual involvement that were rife with homo clausus type assumptions. In terms of what I was told, the 'history of the victor' approach was embedded in how they perceive and present the history of their firms, with 'important' events explained in terms of the one man (always a man) in a particular generation of the firm who (seemingly alone) developed and expanded the firm and produced his successor.

This form of explanation recalls what Elias has argued about monarchs and their courts, where one person is in power on the face of things, but where all those with whom a monarch is connected are what make their power possible (Elias 1969[2006]: 4-5). However, the history is still invoked as exemplary of tradition and continuity across generations in each firm. But the long-past is decidedly remote for

the funeral directors I spoke with and they make the passed-down stories about long-ago eras in terms of their perceptions of the present (Elias 1969[2006]: 8-9). What is remembered more clearly is probably considered by default as more important in explaining the firm's development. Indeed, 'Memory inevitably gives way to history as we lose touch with our pasts' (Olick and Robbins 1998: 111). The long-past for the people I spoke with has been drawn into homo clausus type views and disjointed lists of events. However, by contrast the funeral directors' accounts of now are decidedly we-centric.

Ultimately, sociogenesis is an irrelevancy for individual firms and their members. Rather than being concerned with over-time imperceptible development, the independent funeral firms consider change for the better to be 'good' and a marker of their abilities, and change that interferes with business and the persistence of the firm as 'bad'. Recalling Elias's ideas about 'good past' and 'bad present' (Elias 1979[2010]: 14), many of the funeral directors I interviewed have an idealised version of the past, and in times of trouble wish the present would play out in mimicry of that. But this view is secondary to them. What is primary is that the business should continue seemingly intact. While many things are changing within and around their firms, they emphasised the stasis in all of this in terms of the 'tradition' and longevity of their figurations. This may perhaps be because for the independent funeral directors tradition seems comfortable, certain, known and thus innocuous. Berman argues that 'Although most ... people have probably experienced modernity as a radical threat to all their history and traditions, it has, in the course of five centuries, developed a rich history and a plenitude of traditions of its own' (Berman 1988: 16). The funeral directors may or may not perceive their roles in developing the traditions in which they participate, but what is certain is that their focus is primarily on keeping the firm in business, which in their comments often involves evading change wherever possible. There are many practices reinforcing the axiom of 'if it isn't broken, don't fix it' and the funeral directors seem largely to interpret change as presenting problems or being a threat to the longevity of their firms. As such it is understandable why they emphasise the 'traditional' and other elements evoking sameness and permanence. Hobsbawm related points out that '...

all invented traditions, so far as possible, use history as a legitimator of action and cement of group cohesion' (Hobsbawm 2013/1983: 12).

With the funeral directors continuing to prioritise supposed long-running traditions practiced across the generations, the gradual development and change of these practices becomes increasingly obscured over time. This points up Elias's (1984b[2013]) arguments about myths and call for sociologists to clear them away. For the independent funeral directors, the 'actual' processes do not appear very important, with performance of practices indicating historical ties, sacred activities and notions of a calling being central in their daily work. 'Some invented traditions obtain their legitimacy by recreating an ideal past' (Hammer and Lewis 2007: 4), and in the case of the funeral firms the traditions legitimise the present of the firms. And through this, their engagement in supposed long-running traditions is important in obscuring and downplaying the reality that all of them can fold. Imbuing their daily work with ties across history encourage both funeral directors and their customers to understand the firms as permanencies. Returning to my earlier point regarding the 'actual processes', the funeral directors do not appear concerned with what the changes are, as long as things mainly seem to stay the same and they can continue business. The firms experiencing present difficulties, like Conan Doyle & Sons, would prefer things to more closely resemble 'the good old days' when the neighbourhood was mostly English and there were no issues in integrating with incoming communities. Conversely firms like O Wilde & Sons, which are becoming increasingly profitable, embrace the present and suggest they have had success simply because they have good business sense and give people what they want.

As a group, a figuration, their view of change seems to hinge upon whether business is 'better' or 'worse' compared with an idealised perception of how it was for previous generations at the firm, with the concern being to ensure that the present one is not the generation that 'allows' the firm to cease operating. In other words, for these independent funeral directors, their view of change rests upon a collective interest in persisting in much the same assumedly smooth way they associate with the histories of their firms. Although the firms are undergoing sociogenetic processes, the funeral directors instead perceive things in terms of longevity, something inherently static.

Gabriel and Mennell recall Elias's argument that 'the chain of generations has been "broken" by the growth of individualism, individual searches for meaning that can have a "strange form of forgetfulness" because they encourage us to treat personal achievements as if they were not dependent on others, but exist in isolation' (Gabriel and Mennell 2011: 9; Elias 1986b[2008]: 264-5). Although knowing many main events and stories about their firm's past and despite claiming tradition to be fundamental, the independent funeral directors I interviewed seem remarkably presentist in their thinking. For them, what matters most are the funerals, the everyday and the ultimate aim of staying in business. As such, their focus generally centres around the practical aspects of winning out in competition, addressing local needs and challenges and maintaining the passed-down 'tradition' of the firm. And all this is done with the aim of keeping the firm in operation in the present, despite any obstacles which arise. While I have an Eliasian conception of the funeral directors' accounts as being subsets of short-term processes set within the long-term processes of each firm's sociogenesis, they understand the long- and short-term very differently. Nonetheless, to understand the unfolding present, it is necessary to understand what came before (Elias 1987a[2009]). However, the historical documents that family funeral firms have retained are largely limited to accounts, ledgers and family photographs, which require considerable interpretation in a present-day context and anyway do not illuminate much about sociogenetic processes or figuration.

As such, my research necessarily uses interviews and fieldnotes. And as stated regarding oral accounts, people do not recall the past in any great amount of detail. Dates and important events come to mind, but the actual processes through which the firm developed over the more distant past is either lost to memory, or glossed in highly generalised and romanticised covering phrases, sometimes being stated in list form. Consequently, the directors often explained fairly recent developments in their firm as the history. The result is that just as interviews are a snapshot in time, so too is the perception of the sociogenesis I gained through them talking. As discussed in the previous chapter, creating maps for each firm was an attempt to grasp its long-term development, and although these instead depicted longer-term networks, at least they did encompass a longer-term period. The interview with O Wilde & Sons

produced the only map which clearly highlighted the firm's development, but this was because the firm had expanded rapidly in the recent past and the person I interviewed, Alex, was able to read off dates from his records of each associated acquisition. Here the more recent past was graspable.

A main challenge, then, has been learning about the over-time development of each firm as more than a succession of dates and organisational additions.

Sociogenesis is about long-term processes around a sense of common purpose.

Processes are not disjointed and regimented in the ways that lists are; and it was and remains difficult to know how to ask questions that would lead conversations in this direction, with my attempts perhaps being understood by the directors as inquiries about key figures and networks in the public story of the firms. However, this is not only a problem to do with the 'official story', but also that people remember different things at different times (Abrams 2016: 84). As our conversations about particular developments continued, a longer and more processual story often emerged, built out of many interwoven stories across time. Asking what the interviewee deemed 'important' about the development of their firm resulted in a dis/orderly series of anecdotes about events over time. Similarly asking 'what has changed?' often evoked details of what had persisted, but discussions of change sometimes also conveyed details of developments in the firm in connection with the industry at large. For example, many of the directors mentioned their thoughts on trade organisations, the rise of large conglomerate firms, and the Monopolies & Mergers Commission's concerns about Dignity in the late 1990s. Although interviews are short and one-off, the conversations that occurred pertained to much broader periods did not extend far enough to delineate or approximate sociogenesis. These conversations moved back and forth from now, to distant history, to near future, to recent past, in an order meaningful to the speaker, and this often led to my having a deeper understanding of how developments and the groups involved in them are intertwined.

In relating main events type information, in many cases a different kind of history was interwoven throughout this, with the funeral directors telling me about things that came to mind while we were talking. For example, while relating the main events over the course of R L Stevenson & Son's longevity, Lily, Alan and Tobias also shifted into telling stories of their childhoods in the firm and related

anecdotes, or stories involving people who once worked for their taxi service. Likewise, after explaining how W Shakespeare & Son sold their woodyard and ceased making their own coffins, Sloan recalled childhood days spent chasing bright orange salamanders across the logs with the other firm children, and then talked about his trip to an American funeral firm, and some of the dishonest sales tricks the owner told him about. From Julian, I learned that he considered his brother to be ‘the favourite’, and that he used to skip school to help out at Conan Doyle & Sons. And from Alistair’s account of the years following World War II, I learned about B Stoker & Son’s issues with the workmen hired to exhume French soldiers, and the firm’s related forays in the black market wine trade. Initially, these stories seemed as just detail and as anchors for main events, but I began to realise they were actually what is presently important about the firm’s history according to the funeral directors as members of a figuration. However, assembled together, the interwoven stories and main events contribute a range of fragmented details toward the aim of tracing sociogenesis.

These fragments are what make up people’s perceived lives together and help members of figurations interpret their situations within the broader scheme of long-term development. For members of a firm figuration, the stories were as central – if not more – than the main events in terms of how they perceive time passing and changes happening. The fragments are also what signposts gradual over-time developments, but in this case were limited largely to the speaker’s adult life and pre-packaged stories passed down.

The long- and short-term developments of each firm are unique, and Elias’s processual approach suggests these add up and play a part in the sociogenesis of the funeral industry. However, while the link here with the longevity of independent firms is clear enough, that with sociogenesis is trickier than Elias avows. Elias (1939[2012], 1970[2012], 1987a[2009]) conceives sociogenesis as the long-term developing of interwoven figurations through time, with the underlying assumption that everything builds on what came before it, that there are at least some forms of figurational continuity in the *longue durée*, and that the past resounds. But as I have found in my research, people often visualise the past in terms of their own personal present within a group. And as such, sociogenesis seems to have little to do with the

particular people involved and what they do even though it depends on these people as the vehicle for necessary continuation. One might conclude that sociogenesis is achieved wherever a succession of people are interacting over a long-term period and that neither development nor longevity are essential to it.

The independent funeral directors' explanations of their firms' longevity seem less about presenting a public face to me, and more about explaining how they think their particular business can be kept profitable. Many of them highlighted their approaches as tailored for the surrounding community, seeing this as happening at various points in the past as well as the present, connecting this with the firm's history, its staff and other factors. The persisting of independent funeral firms seems to be partly about staying the same, partly about changing and partly happenstance. As noted previously, things are not always changing nor always in flux. However, the sameness suggested in using terms like longevity, persistence and tradition is misleading, as tradition develops through use and persistence is possible because firms adapt over time. In Eliasian terms, the words and what they stand for, as well as the people using them in their over-time interactions within and between figurations, are all engaged in the processes of perpetual becoming. Elias argued that aspects of society do not altogether change from entirely one state to entirely another (Elias 1971[2009]: 14), and here I would add that aspects cannot altogether stay the same either.

In discussing the accounts given in interviews with people from independent funeral firms in Britain about the persistence of these, this chapter has pointed out some of the ways in which sociogenesis in context can be far more complex, differentiated and divergent than might be expected from Elias's conceptual definitions. The chapter has also demonstrated that contextual forms of sociogenesis are not entirely about continual flux, that asking people about long-term development may present the researcher with accounts of long-term persistence, and that funeral directors perceive much of what contributes to individual funeral firms' longevity as elements of stasis. What contributes to the stasis aspect of sociogenesis, and how exactly does that occur on a case-by-case basis? One key factor is a devotion to keeping the work 'traditional' and 'as it has always been', along with a calling to do high-quality work and provide outstanding service. However, in prioritising notice of

things staying the same, funeral directors largely disregard the imperceptible ways in which the tradition develops through continued use in daily work.

In describing what has changed, all the funeral directors made references to tradition in some way and in many cases these pertained to ‘traditional’ qualities of their particular way of arranging and directing funerals, which was presented as the main focus of their business. What is tradition, though? What does this term really add up to in practical contexts? The funeral directors used terms such as ‘old fashioned’ and ‘traditional’ in discussions of funeral arrangement processes, saying that although they must ‘move with the times’, they try to keep the existing funerary traditions of their particular area at the forefront. Drawing on discussions of invented traditions (Berman 1988; Hobsbawm 2013/1983; Hammer and Lewis 2007) I have explained ‘tradition’ as it is manifested in the practices of independent funeral firms as being something largely invented and serving a dual purpose: tradition not only reinforces feelings of belonging and habitual beliefs and behaviours within funeral firms, but also supports and reifies the firm’s legitimacy and perceived longevity over time. In other words, tradition is a tool and set of practices useful for group cohesion (Hammer and Lewis 2007: 4-5) as well as customer perception. The funeral directors I interviewed have identified these factors as being among those contributing to the actual continuation of their own firms. They explained this in terms of ‘what the customers want’, but it may be more true that the funeral directors are acting to ensure their own wants which continue to inform how funerals are arranged. As I have argued through this chapter, they want things to stay the same, and whatever else changes, they want to ensure their firms stay in business. It seems as though tradition may be the rationale behind stasis and which is also interdependently related to the habitus of a given funeral director.

In Elias’s view, sociogenesis is a means of indicating the over-time inter/actions and un/planned outcomes of an amalgam of interwoven figurations, conceived in terms of an unbroken continuum from generation to generation (Elias 1977[2009]: 9). Throughout their processual and overlapping re/articulations across time, figurations re/birth themselves. And over the *longue durée*, these processes of re/birthing involve emerging social and relational aspects that build un/evenly and at different rates upon what came before (Elias 1969[2006]: 8-9). As such, sociogenesis

concerns the processes through which figurations come together and also dissipate over the long term.

The independent funeral directors' version of sociogenesis is a narrative in which history and 'tradition' are evoked and used as a means of describing and emphasising their firms' over-time longevity. And although recognising aspects of their interdependence as members of independent firms, the funeral directors' accounts of the everyday and changes occurring are underpinned by in-group perceptions of autonomy from other firms. The particular firm will persist despite others having 'failed'. There have undoubtedly been many over-time shifts and trends across the sociogenesis of each firm and the industry more broadly, but the funeral directors do not know much about these and they present the changes they perceive in terms of necessary concessions, which are those that the firm had control over making. They are deeply concerned with factors contributing to the firm's persistence and focus their accounts on the actions taken to ensure that things will continue in a stable and similar way. This conception of stability is constructed in the present while it mimics the funeral directors' ideas about how things were in the firm's past. Their primary concern is the appearance of stasis, and they disregard other changes as 'failures'. Thus what was conveyed to me suggests that for the funeral directors there is not so much a general process of long-term change as there is a point along a continuum at which their firm endeavours to remain indefinitely.

Elias's view of sociogenesis differs from the funeral directors' approach in some interesting respects. Firstly, although Elias conceives sociogenesis as a term denoting perpetual over-time change, the funeral directors explained the long-term development of their firms as predicated on matters of longevity and stasis. Despite recognising elements of change, as Julian did in his example of continuing his grandparents' tradition, the funeral directors largely do not account for how and in what ways the 'traditional' aspects they endeavour to preserve are gradually changing through these acts of preservation. Developments of this kind are largely imperceptible to those involved and over short periods of time, and so they go unnoticed. And although the funeral directors do recognise some ways in which traditions have been adapted, they emphasise the elements of stasis and assume that largely things continue to be as they were. Consequently the funeral directors view

their firms' persistence over the *longue durée* as contingent upon processes of remaining the same rather than gradually changing.

Secondly, while for Elias there is a reciprocal and interdependent relationship between figurations of people and sociogenetic processes, funeral directors view this relationship in a fundamentally different way. Rather than being interdependently related with processes of development, the independent funeral directors present their firms as if in continual opposition to these. The understanding of firms standing in opposition to social change is based in the assumption that the two can be separated, and that one can exercise control over the other. The implied fight between funeral directors and social change centres around an interest in maintaining and preserving the 'traditional' elements that are perceived as characterising past generations of the firm, and keeping these safe from the forces of change. At the same time, although the funeral directors presented tradition as something fixed, they have also given examples of the ways in which those traditions have indeed developed through continued use. Consequently, building on discussion here, the next chapter will use Elias's ideas about *habitus* in exploring the daily work and views of funeral directors.

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Chapter Four

Habitus and We-Identities in Arranging Funerals

Arthur: We've got tradition. Tradition: we have it. They don't (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Huxley 4.9.2014: 174-5).

'In this respect as in others, the past leaves its imprint on the present order and conduct of people – implicitly as one of its conditions, explicitly through the image that living generations carry with them of their country's past; it has, like the future, the character and function of one aspect of the present. As determinants of conduct, the past, present and future operate together. Experienced situations are, as it were, three-dimensional' (Elias 1989a[2013]: 280).

I. Introduction

Having in the previous chapter presented a re/thought sociogenesis and how questions in connection with my research on independent funeral firms in Britain, the next piece of the analytical puzzle I want to engage with is, why do such firms stay in business? Obvious answers include the need to earn an income, and pride in the family business. However, in thinking with Elias these are somewhat tangential, with the pertinent questions that need to be asked including, what is it that binds a firm together at any given point in the sociogenesis of its figuration? What roles do conflict, discontinuities and change play? And relatedly what if anything is common to independent funeral firms that ties them together as a subset of the British funeral industry?

So far, this thesis has used Elias's key ideas of sociogenesis and figuration, but has only given mention to habitus in passing, including briefly discussing the role of habitus in terms of assumptions and potential in-group discord. This chapter shows that investigating the behaviours and beliefs surrounding funeral arrangement processes illuminates a firm's habitus and the practices which distinguish how independent funeral firms approach this from how they perceive that conglomerate firms do. Habitus plays a key role in not only shaping but also extending the sociogenesis of the funeral firm figuration; and habitus is illuminated in particular around how firms approach arranging funerals. Processes of buying and selling funerals are common to all operating firms at all points along their occupational histories, the foundations on which they exist, and so this chapter will explore the dimensions and workings of habitus around the centrality of the funeral arrangement processes.

The discussion begins with explaining habitus as Elias conceptualised it and considers similarities and differences from the presently perhaps more familiar use of the term by Bourdieu. Following this, habitus will be re/articulated in terms of independent funeral firms and the ways that their members explain the perceived realities of daily life and how to run a 'good' funeral firm. It will also be related to funeral arrangement processes, highlighting ways in which this in some ways re-writes Elias's ideas about habitus.

As discussed in the two previous chapters, it has been challenging to reorient my thinking away from applying theoretical concepts. Sociological training encourages application rather than questioning or reformulating existing concepts according to the phenomena (or noumena) being examined: 'the theory is sacrosanct and one size should fit all — or else you're doing it wrong'. As I have argued, using an Eliasian processual approach negates applying his ideas. Process sociology stands in opposition to applying or categorising, with its focus on the 'real' processes at work in any situation (Elias 1969[2006]; Baur and Ernst 2011). Elias elucidates the importance of case-by-case approaches in many of his works, but most strongly in *The Court Society* (1969[2006]). This is via his demonstration of how different nations, having undergone their own unique de/civilising processes and within the processes of state formation and developing habitus, must be understood on their

own terms (Elias 1969[2006]: 75, 122-3). Although Elias demonstrates how the use and re/formulation of concepts depends on the particular ‘real’ situation concerned, his writing presents findings as if answers were easily discernible rather than existing beneath or beyond layers of what is recorded, said and done. I have struggled against the propensity to apply theory in this and other chapters, continually being reminded that it is necessary to stand back from the data and attempt to discern what more is going on. As I will discuss at greater length in the following section, notions of the funeral arrangement processes and habitus are contextual and, when the urge to apply is put aside, have analytically rich possibilities.

II. On Habitus

Although preceding chapters have used the term ‘habitus’, it is necessary to briefly differentiate here between ‘social’ and ‘individual’ habitus for the purposes of clarity in the analysis following. In discussing key aspects of Elias’s conceptualisation of habitus, Mennell reminds that ‘there is a connection between the long-term structural development of societies and long-term changes in people’s social character or typical personality make-up’ (Mennell 1990a: 207). Perhaps influenced by the work of Anna Freud and also his long-term interest in Gestalt psychology, Elias’s view of habitus hinges upon the relationship between the psyche (I) and the social (We), which he considers as two sides of the same coin (Elias 1987[2010]: 9, 1970[2012]). Although the psychical and ‘personal’ habitus aspect is inexorably interconnected with its social habitus counterpart (We-I cannot be separated), my focus in this chapter will be on the social habitus of firms as figurations. In other words, although each person’s habitus constructs and is constructed by the social habitus of the group and vice versa, it is the habitus of the firm (social) and not the internalised habitus of particular funeral directors (psyche) that is the analytical focus here. Elias uses the term habitus in referring to the ‘deeply habituated personality characteristics – “second nature” – that people share with fellow members of groups’ (Elias 1986c[2009]: 56n). And what is meant by this is the broader in-group social mentality which is also mirrored in any given member’s social personality structure. After all, ‘The idea of the individual bears in himself or herself the habitus of the group’ (Elias 1987[2010]: 164).

However, when social scientists think of habitus, the Bourdieusian conceptualisation is most likely to come to mind. Indeed, a large body of literature has applied Bourdieusian habitus in studies of boxing (Wacquant 1992, 2004, 2005, 2011), drug use (Bourgois 2004; Bourgois and Schonberg 2007), education (Reay 2004; Dumais 2002) and gender (McNay 1999; McLeod 2005; Powell and Sang 2015) to name a few. In the field of death studies, Seale (1998) explores the meaning of the body in social theory and Fowler (2004) draws on Bourdieusian vocational habitus in her analysis of women's obituaries within the genre. De Witt (2003) argues that commercial practices such as funerals are incorporated in Ghanaian 'local habitus' and, with regard to the Japanese funeral industry, Suzuki (2002, 2012) explores Japanese practices as habitus in framing the industry's commercialisation. Further literature concerns representations of death and social class (Conway 2013, 2012) and bereavement (Winkel 2001). Although Bourdieu's view of habitus is presently the most popular in contemporary sociology, the origins and early conceptions of habitus have been attributed to Aristotle, from the Greek 'hexis' (Eikeland 2008; Malikail 2003), Thomas Aquinas (Nederman 1989), Husserl (Moran 2011), Marcel Mauss (1973) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (2012/1945, 1963/1942; see also Lau 2004; Lizardo 2004).

Although habitus as a concept has been widely popularised through the work of Bourdieu (1984, 1990a, 1990b; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) and although Shilling (2012), Bowen et al. (2012) and others have noted the similarities between the two conceptions of habitus (see the discussion in Freund 2015: 161), more recent translations of Elias's work have pointed out that his use and rather different conceptualisation of habitus considerably predates Bourdieu's (Elias and Dunning 1986[2008]: 6n11; Connolly 2015: 1039; Conde 2011: 43, Mennell 2014; Dunning and Mennell 2013). Elias's habitus stands in contrast to Bourdieu's in three main respects. Firstly, while the Bourdieusian version proposes that habitus can be found, measured, pinned down and categorised, Elias's approach understands it to be like the air: surrounding all members of a group and contributing to shared understandings, beliefs and styles of comportment within a collective context. Just as with his ideas about figuration, habitus cannot be picked up and examined nor separated from the people who construct and embody it. Rather than conceiving it in

terms of thingness, Elias views habitus as a characteristic ‘essence’ which is ungraspable and has elusive, air-like qualities. For Bourdieu, habitus conversely refers to ‘systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures’ (Bourdieu 1990a: 53). Bourdieu continues that ‘Habitus reveals itself ... it consists of a system of dispositions, that is, of virtualities, potentialities, eventualities-only in reference to a definite situation. It is only in the relation to certain structures that habitus produces given discourses or practices’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 135); and here, seeing habitus as ‘revealing’ itself implies its thingness, or perhaps that it is something composed by a set of things.

Secondly, although both Elias and Bourdieu present habitus as a set of beliefs and behaviours which help to characterise membership within a particular group, for Bourdieu habitus is something which produces a set of classifiable qualities and outcomes directly associated with in-group membership: just as there are types of capital, so too are there types of habitus. Elias, on the other hand, proposes that habitus is the essence, the uniquely sedimented bedrock underlying the behaviours and beliefs associated with particular group membership which can neither be categorised, nor gathered up and typified. Relatedly, Bourdieu explains habitus both as historically produced but often not recognised as such: ‘The habitus – embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history – is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product’ (Bourdieu 1990a: 56). Habitus forms a second nature and the second-nature quality of habitus is that of an autonomic response: people do not usually consider how they breathe and this has no effect on whether their breathing continues. Elias conversely understands habitus to be constantly re/producing: each generation within the figuration builds on parts of the existing framework of understanding and discards others. The main difference is that for Elias habitus is not about typology. Remembering Anderson et al.’s (1985) ‘fair play’ ideas from Chapter One, it is important to note Gorski’s (2013) argument that the translation timeline of Bourdieu’s works into English, as well as the popularity of several titles over the rest, have contributed to a particular Anglo understanding of Bourdieu as a theorist focused on social reproduction rather than transformation. He suggests that this is an unrealistic viewpoint and that the

depiction of Bourdieu as unconcerned with social development suggests limited knowledge of his work (Gorski 2013: 5-8). Taking this into account, Gorski notes that Bourdieu uses habitus to explore breakdowns and successes of social reproduction (Gorski 2013: 9). Contra this, Elias has used habitus to examine long-standing institutional practices. While unsurprisingly Elias's conception seems more to do with development than Bourdieu's, this may not really be the case.

Thirdly, Elias's distinctive take on habitus is relatively new on the sociological 'scene', most likely because Elias's use of the word 'habitus' was previously translated as 'personal makeup' (Mennell 2014: x) or 'belief and behaviour tradition' (Dunning and Mennell 2013: xxiii). Although Dunning and Mennell have long argued that when Elias uses the term 'habitus' he means 'second nature' or 'embodied social learning' (Dunning and Mennell 1998: 340), the newest translations of Elias's work have made this much clearer (see *The Collected Works of Norbert Elias*). For Elias the concept of habitus is to do with the attitudes, beliefs, behaviours and assumptions which members of a figuration of any size learn from each other and reify as well as develop through in-group interaction or in reaction to out-group happenings (Elias 1984[2007], 1987[2010]). These understandings which group members come to possess develop in a diffuse way and take on 'second nature' qualities, so it is often unclear how they have been learned and how they are embodied by any given person. And in distinguishing groups and their members, habitus is notable regarding the ways in which associated people comport themselves in everyday life (Kilminster and Mennell 2008: xix). Simply put, habitus within any given group is the normal and what is 'normal' in terms of behaviours, attitudes, understandings, beliefs and so on.

Habitus is in a sense inherited, lived, re/worked in new circumstances and transmuted by each succeeding generation. Elias notes that 'The latter [patterns of civilisation] find one of their most tangible expressions in the common *social habitus* of the individuals who form with one another a particular survival unit' (Elias 1986a[2008]: 5). He continues by explaining that 'They inherit... specific forms of self-regulation which they absorb through learning like a common language and which are encountered as common features of social habitus, the feelings and behaviour of the members of a tribe or nation state' (Elias 1986a[2008]: 5). Elias's

view then is that although individual people may be unique on many levels, each figuration (survival unit) has a specific character (habitus) which is shared with its other members and this in turn forms what is distinctive about the particular individuals composing this collectivity, its pattern (Elias 1987[2010]: 163-4). And just as the writing of history is a practice that changes with the times, so too do the absorption and comportment processes of the groups that any given person belongs to. Some enduring threads of continuity exist, but at the same time habitus re/develops within groups: some things change, some do not (Elias 1939[2012]: 445, 103, 479, 1970[2012]: 142). The social habitus of any given group develops over-time what Elias terms as ‘diminishing contrasts and increasing varieties’ (Elias 1939[2012]: 422-7). What he means by this is that, as societies develop, more people enter into contact with each other and the over-time pattern produced shows that through their we-relationships within figurations, people can be characterised both as having more in common with one another and as having more differences from one another. Everything ‘new’ builds on what was previous to it, whether this is a reiteration of a behaviour or belief in a succession of generations, or the weeding out of out-dated practices.

Elias points out several overarching characteristics of social habitus. Unlike sociogenesis, which is a very gradual and imperceptible over-time movement, and unlike figuration, which is intangible to any given person, habitus can be recognised through noting similarities within and comparisons between groups (Elias 1984[2007]: 20-21, 131). The main characteristics of social habitus is a figuration’s pattern of self-regulation and restraint and within this its use of language and also its understanding and structuring of time (Šubrt 2014; de Carvalho 2015; Tabboni 2001). Social habitus for any group is characterised by behavioural patterns in terms of people acting or not acting in particular ways and this is rooted in Elias’s theory of the de/civilising process (Elias 1939[2012]). For any given group, there are taboo and admired actions, beliefs, understandings, gestures and phrases. How members operate within social settings is indicative of their socialisation into the habitus of groups to which they belong and is also characterised by degrees of, to use Elias’s terms, self-restraint and self-regulation (Elias 1969[2006], 1939[2012], 1984[2007]). These are ideas and behaviours that new members observe and absorb and they

become an in-group ‘second nature’. How group members think, act and the choices they make in terms of doing or not doing things characterise the group’s habitus as an interconnected figurational entity and denote any given person’s membership. Elias argues that self-regulation and restraint are not biological or metaphysical, but social in character and observing or breaking with the habitus of the group is tied strongly to aspects of belonging and self- and group-respect (Elias 1984[2007]).

At a graduation ceremony in New York, the person I was with whispered, ‘I can’t understand a word of this’, which was a talk about the research that the graduating students were involved in. There are times when what is being said sounds as if spoken in a shared language but is incomprehensible to outsiders because they cannot grasp the in-group patois or, in Wittgenstein’s (1986/1953) phrasing, the ‘language-game’. Funeral directors too use particular abbreviations, phrases and ways of explaining. Groups share a common way of communication and such language use is a cornerstone of habitus (Elias 1984[2007]: 17). Language-games and the words used as tools for expression and explanation differentiate each group and its members from others. Certain words or phrases are used more, less, or differently from other groups and the over-time development of language usage acts to differentiate one from the others. Perhaps more importantly, language has a way of shaping perceptions, beliefs and ideas. Elias comments that in-group communication practices become part of each member’s patterns of feelings and behaviours and group patterns interact with individual patterns not only to develop a distinguishing group mentality (habitus), but also to confirm each person’s belonging within the figuration (Elias 1984[2007]: 16-17). In this way habitus is what underscores the inexorability of interrelated people with the aim of solving the logic-problem of the individual-society dichotomy (Elias 1987[2010]), a sociological perennial which Elias thereby neatly dissolves away.

Socialised within groups, people learn ‘who they are’ and their purpose in terms of the group/s they belong to and the ways in which things about the world are expressed within these. Thus the forming of personality is in terms of the group: ‘Individual characteristics, through which difference from any other people is expressed, do not develop independently of and in separation from these social characteristics’ (Elias 1984[2007]: 116). This is a process which also takes place

within the framework of in-group language usage. This is not to say that each figuration, because it has particular ways of expressing thoughts and beliefs, is automatically differentiated. Instead, the ways in which a common language is used is telling of the group mentality. To use Elias's (1984[2007]) analogy, each individual has a distinctive handwriting within a common language.

Depending on the structure of a given society, any particular figuration must observe associated norms in order to structure daily interactions. Whether the day is ordered by the sun or a clock, Elias (1984[2007]) argues that patterns of self-regulations to do with time will have a profound effect on the habitus of individuals within groups. This is one of the main aspects Elias pointed up in exclaiming from his seat on a moving train that 'Time is running away' (*Lessen van Elias* 1975: 46:33-46:37). Simply put, how people understand themselves is related to in-group belonging; what they do is interrelated with the actions of others in a given setting; and such settings are governed by structural characteristics, including the prevailing understanding of time and how it works. For Elias (1984[2007]), time only exists as a measure constituted by social settings. Elias argues that, 'The almost inexorable self-regulation in terms of time by people brought up in highly time-regulated societies is a good example of what is meant if one speaks of the social habitus of an individual person' (Elias 1984[2007]: 116). Time is core in such societies. In a highly time-regulated society, everywhere one looks there are clocks and reminders that there are 'not enough hours in the day'. Being 'busy' is equated with being important or successful and members of a highly time-regulated society and groups which abide by its temporal mores will strive to be or appear to be busy and fill the available time.

For Elias, the most helpful way of recognising the embedded temporal nature of self-regulation is through close attention to the markers and remnants of differing de/civilising processes. A person from a highly time-regulated group who visits an area where time is not as regulated would be immediately surprised, perhaps shocked, by the sight of people 'doing nothing'. Elias continues that, as the structuring and use of time is integral to the habitus of groups, so it helps people understand and perhaps visualise their own habitus 'in fuller relief', something achieved through contrasting with other groups with different modes of temporal

regulation (Elias 1984[2007]: 133). Even if ‘stage of development’ is deleted from the equation, the truism that better understanding comes through contrast with others still stands.

Through examples, Elias (1967[2009], 1969[2006], 2007a, 1989a[2013]) provides glimpses of habitus at work in a variety of settings, taking different forms in each. And his conceptions of habitus are, much like habitus itself, embedded, illusive and implied. For each of his key uses of habitus, Elias illuminates different aspects of it so that each is distinctive but also alike. These are breadcrumbs Elias has thrown along the path to understanding what is meant by ‘habitus’. He explains by detailed example rather than decree with the result of enticing readers to use his ideas for their own research purposes, as well as show them the myriad ways they can be used.

Elias’s example of habitus in *Studies on the Germans* (1989a[2013]), a key discussion, has to do with its national form, the collective habitus of those belonging to a particular nation. At the state level, national habitus is what drives ‘nationalism’. The German national habitus was re/formed in terms of an idealised past, with Germany as a powerful nation-state. Elias comments on Hitler’s rise to power, theorising he was able to take control by harnessing an existing habitus and reforming it for his own purpose, similarly to how ‘Later empires presented themselves as renewals of the old empire’ (Elias 1989a[2013]: 244). Through an understanding of important factors to do with German national habitus, Hitler embedded his own ideas within these and thereby presented them in a palatable way. Another example is in Elias’s *The Court Society* (1969[2006]) where he explains court life in terms of an institutional habitus based on the pursuit of prestige, dominance, inclusion and preference. Through this, Elias (1969[2006]) points up the in-group nature of habitus and also the importance of learned forms of self-regulation. In addition, his study of the naval profession, despite also denoting institutional habitus, demonstrates its learned qualities and its inherited re/forming processes. Here, shipmates are socialised into a belief and behaviour tradition through a particular apprenticeship model and come to understand their work in terms of a ‘calling’ in the Weberian sense (Elias 2007a). Elias’s descriptions of habitus in these examples illuminate different aspects of the concept in context and also underscore that habitus is particular and unique to the group in question. There

will be different patterns of self-regulation, understanding of purpose, ways of maintaining group stability and longevity and of course ways of harnessing existing group mores to achieve a collective outcome or goal.

The habitus of independent funeral directors centres around the everyday work of funeral arranging and the transactional and monetary elements of dealing with death and disposal. Before engaging with the independent funeral directors' habitus in the following section, it is necessary to first discuss what a transaction is.

Avoiding any narrowly economic notion of the term, transactions are less about exchanges of money for goods and services and more about something instrumental, as exchanges between people for the purposes of finishing something. The literature pertaining to consumer purchases in economic sociology operationalises transaction as the smallest unit in economic interactions between parties (Granovetter and Swedberg 1992; Smelser and Swedberg 2005). What of the people involved? There seems a stark divide in the literature pertaining to so-called economic or market transactions and transaction as a social matter. However, in agreement with Zelizer¹ in perceiving transactions as fundamental components in social interaction, I view transactions as the dynamis of people's motivations and decision-making processes in buying and choosing. The social and the market are not as separately boxed as might be assumed, and the people acting and choosing and their related interpersonal relationships therein drive the market. Zelizer also notes that the relational content pertaining to each transaction – who is involved and why and for what purpose – help define what a transaction becomes on a case-by-case basis (Zelizer 1998b: 330).

Elias would most likely agree that funeral arrangement processes in themselves are instances of inter- and intra-figurational interaction toward achievement of a shared outcome and with individual motivations. As with Zelizer's approach to money as a social tool, it is people's inter/actions and the motivations and purposes driving these which denote what the transaction is, why it is happening and what is accomplished. Here Elias might encourage questioning whether funeral arrangement processes are what drive inter-figurational interactions between the mourners/customers and the funeral directors in the short-term, and between funeral directors at frequent points over the long-term; because in both cases they have no

¹ See references for selected publications.

other major reasons for interacting aside from the common goal of arranging funerals.

A basic reality of arranging funerals is that they are exchanges of money for the disposal of a dead person. Putting a socially acceptable spin on this, funeral directors explain their general approach to funeral arranging in terms of an all-accommodating co-production with their customers – as though they are planning an occasion. The following section will discuss the habitus of British independent funeral directors in terms of their understandings and explanations of funerals and their arrangement.

III. Habitus and ‘Should’ for Independent Funeral Firms

Generations of funeral directors are socialised into a specific, organic and developing occupational culture through their work within independent firms and over time this comes to encompass an understanding of the big ‘shoulds’ they perceive as existing. Largely these pertain to how practices ‘should’ be performed, how funeral directors ‘should’ act and foremost the sacrosanct aspects of what ‘should’ be preserved about the firm. Regardless of whatever else may change, these are perceived as aspects that ‘must stay’ because they are what constitutes a ‘good’ funeral firm according to the members of the independent firms I interviewed. Also these various ‘shoulds’ coalesce, become internalised and then considered to be ‘normal’ and based in common sense within a firm – although they also change over time to varying degrees in practice. These factors, as I will show, are what unite funeral firms as they live out the sociogenesis of their habitus. Further, the funeral transaction is the thing on which these behaviours, beliefs and actions all hinge: no funeral transactions, no firm. In discussing funeral directors, many researchers including Howarth (1996, 1997), Harper (2010a), Hockey (1996) Davies (2015), Walter (2016a, 2016b), Parsons (1997, 2003a, 2003b, 2014) and Bradbury (1993, 1999) have noted the various ways in which they separate frontstage performance and backstage death-work. Howarth (1992) notes that people in funeral firms perform the role of funeral director. Building on this, the present-day ‘funeral director’ role also encompasses dimensions of the therapist, salesperson and party planner (Hyland and Morse 1995). Goffman considers funerals as-performance and since then much has been written

with regard to the performative aspects of funeral directing (Goffman 1956: 15, 35, 62-3, 84, 1961: 77-8). Turner and Edgley (2009/1975) analyse the performative qualities of funeral directing in America, promoting a dramaturgical framework for understanding this. Bartlett and Riches (2007) and to some extent Howarth (1992) employ Goffman's concepts of backstage and frontstage to explore boundary management in funeral firm spaces, engaging with the mystical and hidden qualities implicit in managing disposal. Also using Goffman's concept of frontstage and backstage, Hyland and Morse's (1995) ethnography explores the orchestrated elements of funeral arrangement and funeral directors' provision of comfort to mourners/customers during the processes. Likewise, Bailey (2010) examines aspects of emotional management in weighing the balance between funeral directors' different roles and motivations. In all these respects, the work of funeral directing points up aspects of a firm's habitus (and perhaps also some similarities with other firms) because particular firms will have their own long-running traditions and other 'shoulds' which must for them be kept and which re/form over time through continued re/use. In presenting to me neatly packaged and rehearsed narratives of their daily work lives (Dampier 2008: 368-9; Bruner 1991: 19; Tonkin 1990, 1992), the independent funeral directors underscored that: 'we're all about funerals', 'funerals are our life' and similar maxims.

As explained earlier, habitus is manifested in the understanding of 'normal' and is often perceptible in examining the assumptions implicit in representatives' descriptions of everyday practices and the status quo. With regard to the interviews I carried out, 'normal' was consistently explained as understanding their lives as irrevocably bound up with work and in particular with arranging and directing funerals to the highest possible standard (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 351-61; Fieldnotes of Interview with A Huxley 4.9.2014: 30-44; Fieldnotes of Interview with T Orwell 30.6.2014: 326-54; Transcript of Interview with A Wilde 24.7.2014: 247-50; Transcript of Interview with L, A & T Stevenson 22.7.2014: 1077-81, 1174-8, 835). Funerals are the most fundamental aspect of how these funeral firms understand the business and are what habitus is formed around. Everything that a funeral director does is funeral-originated and what they talked about was largely to do with this. Although not always overtly spelled out, this is the

locus of their business and purpose, with all the factors that tie into their explanations of 'how things are' and the 'truths' about their daily business contingent on this.

A funeral involves the purchase of a service which disposes of a corpse. Every funeral arrangement process is different, for these involve short-term and one-off exchanges between members of largely unrelated figurations who thereby become related to the sociogenesis of a particular funeral firm. There is a series of inter/actions or activities contributing to the achievement of a funeral, these inter/actions are instrumental in nature and they are completed in order to get something done. This is for one party (the customers) to have a funeral and the other party (the funeral firm) to receive money for arranging this. For funeral firms, the process begins with the notification of a death and ends with either payment for the funeral or a related follow-up call or customer satisfaction questionnaire. For customers, the process begins during the time of the dying and death in question. Between these two points, there are many decisions to be made and arrangements to be executed. When asked how funeral arrangements generally play out, Alistair explained:

Emilia: How does arranging a funeral play out here? The family calls and comes in, or you go there and make arrangements... and then?

Alistair: Then we get the body – usually from the coroner – and the family has to get doctors to sign off. It's easier if the person has seen their GP in the past two weeks, but if not, they need two doctors – their GP and another one to look over the body and the PM [post mortem report] and sign that it wasn't a suspicious cause of death. When that's done, we can take the body and put it in the [nearby area] refrigerators. If they want embalming, we have as long as they want. If not, there's a short timeline. We ask them what they want, get everything organised and then we have the funeral (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Stoker 4.6.2014: 225-37).

This rather bland first-this-then-that explanation is indicative of the kinds of responses generally made when I asked about funeral arranging. Alistair's overview neatly lists the series of tasks involved from the beginning to the end of the process. As our interview continued, I came to realise that the bland quality of this and other

of his explanations was rooted in my asking about and being answered with routines. While every funeral is unique, routine accounts will reduce to these core aspects (Barley 1983b: 402), and this overview is generalised from many diverse instances and so tells little about the details of particular situations. The common factors, as Alistair explains, are the notification of a death, taking possession of the body, making arrangements with the customer/s, executing those arrangements, conducting the funeral and ensuring the customers are satisfied. Understanding the constants in the process, however, does not inform about what arranging a funeral is like in real working life. However, Alistair's and other directors' stories about particularly memorable funerals present highlights rather than routine events. For instance, Alistair's story about arranging the funeral of the mother of two 'known criminals' illuminated some such particulars:

Emilia: Do you find that how much a client spends on a funeral is related to his or her social status or economic class?

Alistair: Oh yes... yes. On the one side, I had a couple of known criminals living in the estates on [Name] road, a rough area.

Emilia: Yes... I know...

Alistair: [Nods] These two lads visited the [other branch] location – and they wanted everything: horses, top-of-the-line coffin and 12 or so hearses. I usually show clients the cheapest option first, because I don't want to cheat them or make them feel like they're not doing enough. It's bad enough having to arrange a funeral, let alone feel bad about it. Anyway they wanted flowers, flowers, flowers! No expense spared, nothing was too expensive for their mother. At the end of the funeral, they had the reception at a pub next to the estate. They invited all of us too [the funeral directors and people working the funeral]. I was in the pub and someone said one of the brothers wanted to see me in the back room. [Makes gesture of surprise] – I didn't know what to do ... So I went and they were all sitting around a card table. The eldest brother asked, "How much do we owe you?", and I said I'd have to go back to my office and do a tally of things. The funeral came to £38,500! And the brothers came and paid in cash – £50 notes and £200 for each person working the funeral that day. They

said it was the best party they'd been to in a while (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Stoker 4.6.2014: 265-98).

Alistair's account here also hints at his general practices (showing the cheapest options first) and his firm's ability to provide customers with exactly what they ask for irrespective of budget. His comments also suggest considerable emotional involvement, conveying both pride and discomfort: being highly pleased with the flawless outcome of the funeral, but fearing for his safety. Stories although often anecdotal are what make up people's lives. They are also motivated accounts which explain and justify (Baumeister and Newman 1994; Harvey et al. 1990; Orbach 1997; Burnett 1991; Conway 1990; Scott and Lyman 1968) and they have illuminated many topics of interest throughout the research process.

The people I interviewed explained their work as central to who they are as firm members and to everything else they do. Their lives were largely represented as 'about funerals' and by this they meant the main focus is on the arrangement process. A work-centred life of any sort is likely to be very regimented and busy. However, the funeral directors I interviewed embrace firm and professionally-mandated forms of self-regulation in ways that seemingly equate these with legitimacy and belonging. Every firm has a set of shared practices for structuring and managing the work and these are particular to each. Some of these firm-specific practices were presented to me as traditional and passed down (intact), while others were explained as innovative or as 'going along with the times'. However there were also some similarities across the everyday 'proper' practices of the firms where I interviewed. For example, the general house rule across these firms is that 'whoever receives the first telephone call about a death will handle the resulting funeral from start to finish'. Various of the directors also commented that their firms always endeavour to provide customers with exactly what they want regarding timing, specifics and special requests (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Kipling on 11.7.2014: 96-7, 388-97; Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 103-13, 119-20, 317-8; Fieldnotes of Interview with T Orwell 30.6.2014: 152-5, 164-5, 254-7; Fieldnotes of Interview with S Shakespeare 4.6.2014: 178-82, 256-60; Fieldnotes of Interview with H, C & A Melville 8.7.2014: 380-81, 389-90; Fieldnotes of Interview with G Stevenson 26.6.2014: 1174-8).

These factors, compounded by the fact that death cannot be planned and often occurs at inconvenient times such as during the night or holidays, indicate highly time-regulated work patterns and also impact the directors' shared ideas about 'normal'. Lily, Tobias and Alan of R L Stevenson & Son, for instance, explained typical events in their home life:

Tobias: When we all sat at the table – and in those days there weren't mobile phones – the phone would be there [*gestures to his right*].

Alan: It [the phone] was just in the hall [*they all gesture toward the hall*].

Tobias: So they would call and I'd come back in and she [Lily] would say, "What's wrong?" and I would say, "It's a death. Don't know how we're going to get him in a 5 feet 9 coffin". Because that was just part and parcel of living.

Alan: It's just your life, basically.

Lily: Yes; you can be sitting around the tea table and you've got visitors, and all we're talking about is death and coffins and [*mimics the shocked face of a guest*], that was normal conversation.

Alan: I know, it was: "Dad, have you washed that hearse for tomorrow?", "Has so-and-so been dressed?", "They've got a viewing for 7 o'clock", all that...

Tobias: A very time consuming business.

Lily: It's everything with the clock [*taps her wristwatch*] (Transcript of Interview with L, A & T Stevenson 22.7.2014: 826-47).

The Stevenson family's account of their daily life as a family of funeral directors highlights intricacies regarding both their version of 'normal' and their particular understanding of time-regulation as governed by death, clocks and the telephone. Although Alan and his two brothers have since married and moved out, the staples of the family's time-regulation practices have persisted: someone must always answer the phone regardless of what visitors may be present. From the Stevensons' description, it is clear that funerals are indeed central to their lives and that their work in the firm has been instrumental in constructing a 'normal' that extends to the home and elsewhere.

In thinking with Elias, it became clear through the course of interviewing that forms of self-regulation were key in the independent funeral directors' everyday work and their perceptions of this. In a business where customer satisfaction is perceived as a key factor in ensuring a firm's longevity and where the timelines of funerals cannot be neatly planned, some days can be challenging. The Stevensons explained a particularly busy day to me:

Alan: The worst one I remember was Christmas day with me and you [Lily].

Lily: *noise of hesitant recollection*

Alan: And, what, we had four deaths from about 9 in the morning to about 8 at night?

Lily: I was quite used to – for Christmas day, we'd say, "We'll do dinner for 2 o'clock, okay?" And then you'd get called down, had to turn everything off...and then, "Right, we'll do it at 4", right and then you start cooking and getting it in and then [*mimes picking up phone*] and so you'd end up sitting 6 o'clock at night doing your Christmas dinner because... and it was all dried up... because it was off and on like a yo-yo, aye. But then that was our business; that was what we were used to. We just go on and did it (Transcript of Interview with L, A & T Stevenson 22.7.2014: 1091-1104).

Death normally cannot be planned, so neither can the leisure time of the funeral directors. In the above extract, the Stevenson family demonstrates that they value customers' wishes more than personal time, which is indeed in line with everything else they communicated to me. The Stevensons also explained that, in recent years, more customers wish a deceased person to be removed from the house (provided they have died there) immediately. This development results in situations like the Stevensons' disastrous Christmas dinner and further blurs the line between work and home life (Hill et al. 2003; Greenhaus et al. 2003).

Working on many funerals in a condensed period of time is more challenging for the smaller firms, as there are less people to shoulder the work. Contrasting O Wilde & Sons, a large firm with seventy-five employees at its main branch alone, with R L Stevenson & Son, which employs thirteen people in total, shows the different outlook of the former:

Me: Was there ever a crazy day where you had tons of funerals?

Alex: Yes, well, we get those quite regularly (Transcript of Interview with A Wilde 24.7.2014: 399-401).

Deaths occur in a complex but over-time discernible pattern: there may be periods when many funerals are held and others where there are none and these shifts can often be seasonal and weather-related. Short-term fluctuations in death rates are perhaps more noticeable for smaller firms because fewer employees are available. However, Alex's comment intimates that the firm is regularly busy because they are the first choice in the area. Returning to my earlier comment, in heavily time-regulated societies people may often act to appear busy because this equates with success. In fact, many interviewed funeral directors implied through side-comment or sentiment that their firms are continually busy.

While firm size makes some differences to managing funeral arrangements, the majority of the funeral directors interviewed had to answer telephone calls during my interviews with them. In handling a given funeral arrangement process from start to finish, the habitus expectation is that a funeral director 'should' be freely accessible once the process has started. Running a 24/7 business can be challenging, for funeral directors are never 'off the clock' and the daily periods of relaxation which people in other professions may take for granted are unavailable:

Ted: I can't go to the pub across the road because people there will see me and think, "Golly, I don't want him handling my family". And I can't ever relax really – like – my wife and I will be out for dinner and if I get a call, I have to get up and say, "Darling, I'll be back as soon as I can". I sit down at home at night and someone will call. It's really more than a full-time job; I'm always on the clock (Fieldnotes of Interview with T Orwell 30.6.2014: 168-75).

Remembering Goffman's (1956, 1961) performative thinking here, Ted's description of his interrupted leisure time suggests that there is a third possibility: a frontstage, a backstage and an offstage. This third is, however, not available to Ted and his comments suggest this is just another 'normal' reality of being a funeral director. It also points up that for funeral directors impression management is constantly at the

forefront. When in public, he suggests he is always frontstage: everybody present knows him to be ‘the funeral director’ and so he can never let loose as he might in an offstage environment (Reynold and Kalish 1974). Similarly, at home Ted’s leisure time is residual because he must always be ready to answer the telephone. According to Ted, he spends all his time performing the role of ‘good funeral director’, whether he is arranging or conducting funerals, out with his wife or watching television in his pyjamas. At work, Ted is backstage when he is in many of the back rooms embalming a body, screwing the handles on a coffin or loading his van. With notes of resignation, Ted sees himself as having no time which is not devoted to his work in some sense: even at home, although not directly under scrutiny, he is still performing. Horace at H Melville & Sons also indicated that funeral directors cannot count on having even their nights free for sleep:

Horace: Yes. We used to have a contract with the police [to remove bodies]. That got too difficult, because one of us would have to get up and drive wherever in the middle of the night – to a suicide, or a murder or a car crash – and bring the body or bodies to the hospital morgue (Fieldnotes of Interview with H, C & A Melville 8.7.2014: 244-8).

Death can be shocking for those who have lost a loved one; but, as Horace indicates, the contracted funeral firm also sometimes feels this shock. Horace suggests that the unruly time-schedule of death’s occurrence exacerbates the already-fragmented normalities of independent funeral directors’ lives. Having always to be at the ready, they cannot rely on the breaks and comforts that people in other professions may take for granted.

Although they continue to be accessible at all times, technological innovations such as computer programs, mobile phones, email, video conferencing, refrigerators, cars and mass production have helped funeral directors to manage some of the unruly temporal aspects involved. However computer programs, email and mobile phones in particular have also had ramifications in impacting on place and access to space (Hand et al. 2007; Currie and Eveline 2011). Contemporarily, people in highly time-regulated societies may consider being more widely accessible to employers and colleagues as a nuisance, but some independent funeral directors explained this

as a boon because enabling them to leave the house at evenings and weekend while also remaining accessible to their customers:

Alex: It used to be that, when I was growing up, someone had to stay home at all times, weekends and at nights in case someone called because calls would go through [from the firm] to the house phone. Now, with mobile phones, I can go to a friend's house at the weekend and forward all calls to my mobile. Can't go to the pub, but at least I can go to a friend's house. Also, now we use email for everything. We used to have to post letters to the priests and wait for them to write back (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Wilde 1.7.2014: 142-9).

Before using these technologies in his work, Alex was at once freer and also more confined. Now, although he can forward work calls to his mobile and not wait for the post, he is confined in a different sense because the expected temporal schedule has accelerated and Alex's performing of 'the funeral director' has consequently been extended to wherever he might be. Alex similarly explained about O Wilde & Sons' custom-built accounting program:

Alex: We have someone who is good with computers. He designed the interface that we use internally now. It makes a note of who has paid an invoice online [people can pay online via the O Wilde & Sons website]; we keep all the funeral info in there, the finances, everything... and, a couple of years ago, we realised we can access this from home – so now, when somebody calls, I can just pull up their information there [at home] instead of telling them I'd have to check when I go back to the office (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Wilde 1.7.2014: 134-42).

At-home access means that Alex conveniently has all relevant client information to hand, but perhaps inconveniently he is also thereby expected to further the arrangement process from his home (Hand et al. 2007). Again, Alex is describing here both a new kind of freedom and a new form of imposed time-regulation. He does not need to make a special trip to his office to consult a client's information, but he does have to continue working while at home. Alex could be anywhere and any when, but must always remain ready to work at a moment's notice. At weekends,

Alex continues performing although away from his usual stage. However, as new technologies become increasingly embedded in his profession, this stage is expanding (Goffman 1956; see also Kossek et al. 2006; Nam 2014; Beauregard and Henry 2009). Alex's situation reminds of Ted's comments regarding his 'leisure time': that while out with his wife he is still a funeral director and, with mobile phone to hand, he must always be ready for an interruption. Alex's, Horace's and Ted's comments, as well as Lily, Alan and Tobias's comments noted earlier, all depict variations of a 'normal' where one is never off or out of work.

Given all the related 'should' expectations which members of different independent funeral firms continue to impose upon their daily work norms, every firm where I interviewed has developed some specific time-regulation practices. These are directed towards ensuring that each funeral is arranged without a hitch, as far as possible. Working on many funerals at a given time, with these often being at different stages in the process, requires remembering who-is-who and what-is-what for a range of different deaths and funerals. B Stoker & Son, for example, uses daily lists on pieces of paper which each member of the firm is responsible for creating the day before:

Alistair: I make lists every morning – for the next day. *[He went to his office down the hall and came back with a small piece of paper (about half of an A4 sheet) with an organised to-do list on it and showed it to me. He seemed very proud of his list. I tried not to look at it too closely because there were clients' names on it].*

Alistair: Here you are – I wrote this up yesterday. *[He pointed to the list item about meeting with me and at what time]* I like to keep things organised. When it gets really busy, I always know what's on for tomorrow and can plan accordingly. When I was younger, *[chuckled]* I was going out with a very pretty girl in PR who had this saying – she called it the "six P's" – and you'll have to forgive me – there's some colourful language in here: "**P**erfect **P**lanning **P**revents **P**iss **P**oor **P**erformance" (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Stoker 4.6.2014: 237-51).

While there is no such thing as a 'perfect' plan where managing death is involved, taking note of foreseeable appointments and tasks is helpful to B Stoker & Son and

especially Alistair, who seemed quite proud of his organisational system. Each funeral firm's particular approach to managing tasks is suggestive of the firm's structure and idea of itself. For B Stoker & Son, individual workers have their personal lists, but in contrast Joyce & Hardy uses a centralised pegboard in their main office to organise immanent and long-ranging funerary matters:

Nolan: This area [the reception rooms] functions like a typical funeral home and there's an office area in front with our main board.

Emilia: Do you mean a digital board, or a pegboard?

Nolan: Old fashioned way but it works. It's a huge board with all funerals that are scheduled for the week and all information for each funeral (Fieldnotes of Interview with N Hardy 18.7.2014: 230-37).

Here the size of the firm may play a part again, as Joyce & Hardy is larger than B Stoker & Son, and its practices of organising daily work also mirror the structures of both firms. While Joyce & Hardy's structure centralises all main matters in the head office with branches acting as satellites to it, B Stoker & Son's branches operate more autonomously. Likewise Joyce & Hardy's pegboard for centralised tasks suggests a more communal and centralised approach at the firm level: its employees decide together what needs to be done and who must complete these tasks. Conversely, B Stoker & Son's personal list approach mirrors the structure of branches handling their own matters but with common aims and tasks implicit in these. This We-I form of organising recognises the interwoven and interdependent aspects of their everyday tasks.

Although the means of organising people and funerals may vary, the specific end involved unifies independent firms across Britain. The directors I interviewed understand their work with funerals as their main purpose. For them, this necessitates ensuring a high-quality arrangement process, part of which is being freely accessible to 'the families', with this crucial to what it means to be part of an independent firm. As Elias puts it, 'The restraint exerted by social custom has largely turned into second nature and, thus, into self-restraint. A man and a woman brought up according to this tradition could not easily break with it without losing self-respect as well as the respect of their own group' (Elias 1987c[2009]: 240).

However, while many independent funeral firms maintain running a 24/7 business, Kipling's Funerals, a newer firm owned and founded by Jamie Kipling, has instituted regular days off although with very intensive results:

Jamie: [*Laughed*] You have to balance your personal life with your work life. For me, for a long time, they were the same thing. That's a problem. Now, we have days off and nobody will call you if you're off. It's hard to keep things balanced, but you have to (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Kipling 11.7.2014: 276-80).

Kipling's Funerals has addressed the lack of offstage time and thus made possible something which was explained to me as alien to the independent funeral director: uninterrupted personal time (McCarthy et al. 2010). This is interesting through its contrast with what the other funeral directors imparted. All the other directors stated that there is no difference between 'work life' and 'personal life', that the job 'becomes part of you' and that being continually accessible is a normal part of the job. Moreover, presenting themselves as public servants brings with it the view that personal time is not a given, because service comes first; after all, priests do not have days off either. Days off and keeping work and personal life balanced do not resonate with the other funeral directors I interviewed, who are from long-standing firms and aim to uphold what they see as key 'traditions' of their firm and the profession at large. There is consequently a growing tension between this and how the conglomerates and, on occasion, newer independent firms such as Kipling's, conduct business. Funeral arrangement processes involve managing time and people, with repercussions for the funerals themselves. As already suggested, various elements of funeral arrangement will differ given differing firm structures and approaches, but there are the stable elements of round-the-clock service and the same funeral director/s handling the entire arrangement process. If these two key aspects are not observed, most directors from the independent firms believe it is to the detriment of funerals and 'sacred' arrangement traditions, and also points up the potential demise of the unobservant firm: 'They're doing it wrong, and so it's only a matter of time until they fail'. For instance, that funeral directors at Kipling's have regular days off means that each funeral may not be handled by the same person from start to finish. This brings some shared qualities across the habituses of many

more ‘traditional’ independent firms into sharper relief by pointing out the qualities seen to unite them as a distinctive subset of the British funeral industry.

Elias comments that ‘The institutional and habitus tradition associated with this long-term process [international war] makes not only a country’s security, but also its prestige and thus the pride and self-love of many of its citizens, dependent on the power potential of its military establishment’ (Elias 1983[2007]: 5). In addition to sharing some practices, norms and ideas about ‘should’ between them, the independent directors’ ongoing ‘war’ with the conglomerates, the Co-operative Funeralcare and Dignity Plc has further united them against a perceived common enemy and also underscored the shared practices involved in what it means to be ‘independent’ in the funeral industry. Of court society, Elias writes that acquiring a courtier’s habitus was necessary for social survival and this ‘demanded a characteristic patterning of the whole person, of movement no less than outlook and sentiment, in accordance with models and standards which marked off courtiers from people of other groups’ (Elias and Dunning 1986[2008]: 19). Had the conglomerate firms made acceptable efforts to assimilate into ‘the court’ (in this context, the existing hierarchy of established funeral firms) when they entered the market, and had they been perceived as attempting to emulate independent firms’ traditional practices and beliefs, perhaps there would not presently be so much hostility aimed toward them. In presenting the differences between how they do things and how the conglomerates arrange funerals, the same things were commented on across nearly all the interviews.

People from independent firms told me that they occasionally work with other independents and are not in competition with them, because united by common purpose and likeminded habituses:

Emilia: I know this is probably just a nasty assumption, but do independent firms compete over or ever steal clients?

Alistair: No; we don’t worry about that. It’s us together. Dignity and the Co-op are the problem, really. They keep popping up everywhere. And most of them don’t really know what they’re doing. They run things like

the French ², like buying a car: no feelings, it runs like a machine (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Stoker 4.6.2014: 212-19).

Alistair's description of branches of the conglomerates 'popping up' evokes images of weeds in a garden: bothersome, problematic and illegitimate. Likewise the independent funeral directors I interviewed largely seem to consider conglomerate firms as illegitimate because they do not share in key beliefs, behaviours and traditions, and are thus arranging funerals incorrectly. In saying 'It's us together', Alistair portrays the independent firms standing united against a common competitor, preserving the accumulated traditional 'shoulds' of their shared persistence. Conversation often quickly turned to Dignity and/or the Co-operative Funeralcare when I asked about competition. Although perhaps any new competing firm would be a cause for concern, in the prevailing context the hostility expressed by the independent firms is directly tied to their habitus and its notion of 'correct' funeral arrangement practices. As mentioned earlier, Elias (1984[2007]) points out that the habitus of a group is more discernible when confronted with a different group and in what follows I discuss four main points which the interviewed funeral directors raised when commenting on the differences between their (proper) work practices and that of the conglomerates.

The first concerns the structure of the conglomerates:

Julian: There are good people at the Co-op and Dignity. They work hard despite the structural drawbacks – it's a shame that they have to deal with that (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.9.2014: 77-9).

Dignity and the Co-operative Funeralcare are structured in accordance with a hubs-and-main-office model, with one main office overseeing and signing off the majority of decisions, leaving little leeway for decision-making at a local branch level:

Emilia: The other perk of an independent firm, I would think, is not having to answer to 'the mothership'.

Alistair: [laughing] I am the mothership! I can do whatever I want, don't have to answer to

² For detailed accounts of the 'French setup' to which Alistair is referring – i.e. Pompes Funèbres Générales (PFG) – see Trompette (2007, 2011, 2012, 2013).

anyone and can make changes as I need to
(Fieldnotes of Interview with A Stoker
4.6.2014: 220-24).

Alistair is the highest-ranking member of B Stoker & Son, so he is able to make the decisions he wants, whether they be short-term ones pertaining to ‘this funeral’ or long-term ones pertaining to what must be preserved and what can be amended. Although there is still a hierarchy at B Stoker & Son – albeit a fairly simple one – the managing directors at the firm’s other branches reportedly have the same amount of freedom to make decisions. There is an underlying assumption here, that work experience provides a second-nature understanding of what ‘should’ be done in any given situation in order for funeral arrangement processes to continue smoothly and without issue. The corollary is that a second-nature understanding comes into being through long-term experience of arranging successful funerals and also learning from mistakes. Independent funeral directing, according to a common thread in what was said to me, must provide top quality. And ensuring that each individual funeral is conducted at the highest standard possible requires the structure of the firm to allow quick and unfettered decision-making about the specifics involved:

Arthur: You have to be inventive in this
business. And we can if we don’t have people
breathing down our necks (Fieldnotes of
Interview with A Huxley 4.9.2014: 233-5).

This might include carrying out an unusual request, such as having an accordion player in the funeral procession (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 331-45), hiring particular vehicles for the funeral (Fieldnotes of Interview with S Shakespeare 4.6.2014: 178-82), dealing with a hitch in the process because a GP had gone on holiday (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Huxley 4.9.2014: 221-9), or addressing potential problems, like hiring actors to dress up like policemen to marshal a funeral procession (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Huxley 4.9.2014: 210-21). With regard to such intricacies, the funeral directors described independent directors as better able to devise and implement solutions because of the simple and effective structure of their firm.

Building on arguments from the previous chapter, unfettered decision-making comes across as a prized commodity among independent funeral directors. Julian’s

explanation of his decisions at Conan Doyle & Sons were in terms of 'I'. Julian and his brother, the two managing directors, do not have to justify their decisions to an overseeing body and thus are able to make a series of decisions which industry colleagues considered 'crazy' (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 180-84), but which when implemented have been very successful in maintaining existing client bases and also fostering new ones. As discussed in Chapter Three, Conan Doyle & Sons' expansions and renovations in accordance with local changes, as well as their side businesses, have been connected with knowledge of the local community and have contributed to their continuing business success. But amidst all of these changes and enterprises, Conan Doyle & Sons' devotion to tradition, ingrained practices and knowledge of the business have guided their decision-making. On a larger scale, all the decisions related to me during interviews relied on the underlying principles of small-scale management and maintaining continuity. Further examples include H Melville & Sons' decision to open a new branch (Fieldnotes of Interview with H, C & A Melville 8.7.2014: 106-16) and Kipling's Funerals' advertising plans (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Kipling 11.7.2014: 64-80): each were designed and executed at the branch level, were based on local interests and local understandings, and guided by tradition in the firm.

Interestingly, some independent funeral firms where I interviewed, like Joyce & Hardy and O Wilde & Sons, are as mentioned structured very similarly to the conglomerates. However, nobody I interviewed commented on this; and this was not because these firms are unknown to them. Comments pertaining to such firms were complimentary about professional connections and in relating stories of how nice the workers there are (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Kipling 11.7.2014: 328-31; Fieldnotes of Interview with H, C & A Melville 8.7.2014: 86-96, 184-9; Fieldnotes of Interview with T Orwell 30.6.2014: 155-61). The large-scale expansions of Joyce & Hardy and of O Wilde and Sons are apparent within the industry and the funeral directors I interviewed are outwardly proud rather than dismayed by their success. This may be because the independent directors expect others of their ilk to understand the shared beliefs, behaviours and traditional practices involved in arranging quality funerals and assume that conglomerate employees do not:

Arthur: I don't know why they don't check facts before telling people nonsense. Like, [at the Co-op's head office] it's just a bunch of people in Manchester who have never been near a funeral making decisions they haven't got the faintest about. I got fed up eventually and resigned. It was one of those meetings with accountants and everyone was sitting around talking about the last time they raised their prices. None of them had any idea about funerals. ... And all of them in the room exclaimed to me, "Oh Arthur, we need to know what you know! Please help us!" They need to hear my thoughts so they can learn. But there's no fixing them. Bunch of paper pushers. So I resigned in the end. (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Huxley 4.9.2014: 135-47).

As indicated regarding B Stoker & Son, being a good funeral director means understanding how to make appropriate decisions with regard to each funeral being arranged. From what Arthur commented, this second-nature understanding is learned over time through continued work in a proper independent funeral firm. 'Traditional' funeral directors learn the necessary procedures and accompanying values through apprenticeship and in the long term this also includes the requisite understanding of the main 'shoulds', what is 'normal', how to think quickly, self-manage and solve problems. However, as Arthur noted, these skills actually require long-term experience in arranging funerals and working as part of a firm. Arthur also draws on his wide range of experience in different kinds of funeral firms to present as fact that the structure of the independents is more productive:

Arthur: The big difference between them [Dignity and Co-op] and the independents is, well, look behind you [the main reception area for Conan Doyle & Sons, *with employees rushing around, phones ringing and everyone very involved with their set tasks*] – everybody is working! [At the] Co-op, you get three people in charge of bits of one document.

Emilia: So, the problem is bureaucracy?

Arthur: Yes! (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Huxley 4.9.2014: 154-62).

For Arthur, paperwork is an unwelcome interruption and subordinate to the 'real' work of arranging funerals. The maintenance of files and other documentation necessary for sustaining a large, multinational business is for him at odds with the

funeral arrangement process. The critical factor is hands-on, direct involvement in funeral arranging and bits of paper are tangential. According to the independent funeral directors, the conglomerate directors allow the core funeral-centred work to go to the margins and thus ultimately miss the perceived main point of the business, with their work becoming more about hierarchies of management and paperwork. Although Arthur's example stands for the view that hierarchies of supervision interfere with funerals as the main focus and that 'good' funeral firms should have the autonomy to make decisions on a case-by-case basis. This recalls Alistair's earlier comments about localised control allowing managing directors at branches of B Stoker & Son to make decisions according to their own specific needs and situations. In a slightly different sense, paperwork may be considered as what was discussed to me as 'pointless things' unrelated to the funerary work. as Sloan at W Shakespeare & Son commented:

Sloan: I'm pretty involved with the NAFD
[National Association of Funeral Directors]...
I found out that most people couldn't pass the
NAFD funeral directors' certificate exam
because it has a lot of accounting and
bookkeeping and other sorts of pointless things
– they will have people to do that when they are
managing a firm...It was an impossible test and
for no real reason (Fieldnotes of Interview with
S Shakespeare 4.6.2014: 288-94).

In this comment about the certificate examination, Sloan suggests that accounting and bookkeeping are tangential to the 'real work' of a funeral director. This conveys that a good funeral director 'should' not be fettered by such activities and 'should' instead focus on ensuring quality funerals for customers. However, it may also be the case that the certificate exam's impossibility was associated with the demand for funeral directing jobs at the time of its creation (Pagliero 2013). In fact, the certificate is not presently necessary to operate as a funeral director in Britain and these qualifications seem to serve primarily as legitimising workers' expertise in the profession. Supporting this claim, several interviewees displayed their certificates in their firm waiting rooms and Alex even made a point of mentioning having received an award for the year's highest mark in the exam (Transcript of Interview with A Wilde 24.7.2014: 528-37).

Another significant difference commented on in interviews was that the conglomerates do not provide a 24/7 service in the way they 'should'. As previously mentioned, night-time and weekend telephone calls are traditionally received at the funeral directors' homes and the process is begun at a time in accordance with the customer's wishes and dealt with as quickly or slowly as desired. However, the conglomerates are described as proceeding very differently:

George: The Co-op don't really know what they're doing and they make messes. Three or so occasions where I've been at the crematorium and the chap from the Co-op who's ahead of me arrived late to find that the central office didn't send the body to the crematorium, because they forgot, or they've sent the wrong body.

Emilia: That's because they store them centrally? It must be easy to lose track of who's who with so many bodies to account for.

George: Exactly right. And, on top of that, there's a different person every step of the way.

Emilia: Who handles what here?

George: Here, whoever picks up the phone takes the funeral through to the end. If I pick up the phone, I'll handle everything for that family and that funeral. When the office is closed, the phones go through to one of our houses and we handle things from there. With Dignity or the Co-op, you get an automated message and maybe an operator who will tell you what you can do and when. With us, if somebody calls at half 9 at night and says, "Oh, I really want to see Mum", I'll get dressed and go over and make that happen for them. The other thing is, Dignity tell you when you can have the funeral. You don't get to choose. With us, if we don't have enough people for it [on the chosen day], I'll call and get some people to come help out (Fieldnotes of Interview with G Stevenson 26.6.2014: 207-31).

There are two matters of interest here. The first pertains to in-group constructions of urban legends and the second concerns us-versus-them explanations. Regarding the former, Brunvand argues that 'urban legends often depict a clash between modern conditions and some aspect of a traditional life-style' (Brunvand 1981: 189; see also Best and Horiuchi 1985: 492). George and other people I interviewed mentioned the

‘fact’ of conglomerate employees arriving at funerals with the wrong corpse and newspapers have picked up on this (Toal 2013; O’Neill 2013; Cox 2012; Davis 2012; Daily Mail Reporter 2008; Belfast Telegraph Reporter 2012). Why and how this came into use is unclear, but the reasons for its propagation are clear. The media’s interest in selling papers is obvious, but independent funeral directors are another matter and Brunvand’s (1981) notion of a clash with tradition is useful here. The conglomerate funeral firms entered a market in which independent firms had previously enjoyed an oligopoly for several centuries, thereby disrupting their sense of security in both the short- and long-term. The feared situation is that longstanding customers will choose to ‘jump ship’ and arrange funerals with conglomerates and, even worse, will continue using that firm for subsequent funerals. Best and Horiuchi explain that urban legends emerge in response to sources of social strain and ‘are shaped by the perception of a threat to social organization’ (Best and Horiuchi 1985: 488). Increasing competition with the growing conglomerates and associated fears for the survival of their independent firms provides a source of social strain and fosters the proliferation of stories regarding the supposed incompetency and deceitfulness of conglomerate firms, and also the strong us-versus-them outlook.

George’s us-versus-them comparison reminds me of Alistair’s earlier comment, that ‘it’s us together’. Such accounts of Dignity and the Co-operative Funeralcare assume that independent firms know what goes on in conglomerate ones, and also that the independent firms’ traditional practices are preferable and better. The conglomerates are seen as chopping up the arrangement process into several parts handled by different people, depersonalising its service with an out of hours automated answering service, centralised storage and fixed funeral dates. The independent firms by contrast are viewed as providing personal, local, individualised services which are accessible at any time – the way funerals should be, according to them. George and the rest of his family are firmly convinced that the latter is what customers want, as shown by their business thriving over the last decade. What especially infuriates R L Stevenson & Son is that, in their opinion, the conglomerates claim to do all the things that the independent firms do, but they do them wrong. Although the conglomerates claim they are available 24/7, this is not ‘availability’ in the way the independent firms understand it, with no offstage. The independent

funeral directors manage their own time and decision-making. But while the conglomerates imply they do this too, their organisational structure, managerial approach and working practices are seen to add up to something very different. The core difference, however, is that in the conglomerates the same funeral director does not handle each funeral from start to finish and is not accessible at any time that the customer wants. This has consequences for relationships with long-term customers, seen as a cornerstone to the longevity of successful independent firms, but also as indicating a concern for profits rather than quality service. Practices of inaccessibility, depersonalisation and standardisation which my interviewees perceived as characterising the conglomerates are at odds with the habitus of independent firms.

Tobias: Before ehm... the multiples came in, [and now] you can phone Lawrence & Fleming and Jimmy Conrad [now both conglomerate branches] and you get put through to a call centre... in —

Alan: — Birmingham.

Tobias: Birmingham. So, what the hell do they know about [funerary preferences in our city]?

Alan: And the first thing they're asking you is, "Do you really need a funeral director?". That's the first thing they say to you: "Do you really need somebody to come out tonight? Or could it not wait 'til tomorrow?"

Tobias: That's exactly what they say

Lily: [*murmurs*] Oh... my... God.

Me: Are you serious?

Alan: Totally serious.

Birmingham call centre and they say, "Oh, well we could contact the local chap, but do you really need them to come out tonight – could it not wait 'til tomorrow?" (Transcript of Interview with L, A & T Stevenson 22.7.2014: 1186-1202).

As Tobias had pointed out to me, R L Stevenson & Son's two competitors have been sold and became branches of Dignity. Before their sale, these firms conducted business in much the same way as the Stevensons: they forwarded calls from the firm to the home and were on-call at all hours. Tobias is especially annoyed by the centralisation of Dignity's call centres, because of his underlying assumption

that local funerary traditions are important and cannot be known by outsiders (in Birmingham and elsewhere). The Stevensons are also disturbed by Dignity's management of the funeral timetable, which they think should be decided on by the customer. The operational differences between independent and conglomerate firms are less important than the shared perception of the independent directors that there are specific 'correct' ways of arranging funerals. For them, the process of arranging funerals should always be customer-focused: what they want and when they want it, is the proper way.

The third difference expressed to me is related and concerns the perceived focus of the conglomerates on things other than funerals, which is how the independent directors describe their firms. In this connection, I asked Alistair at B Stoker & Son:

Emilia: Did you go straight into undertaking as a profession?

Alistair: Well, it's not a profession, really.

Emilia: But the industry wants to be seen as professional?

Alistair: [*Chuckling*] Yes – professional, but not a profession (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Stoker 2.6.2014: 86-91).

When Alistair said this, I did not immediately understand what he meant. However, it later became apparent that he associates 'profession' with the pursuit of profit. An important belief for the independent firms is that providing high-quality funerals outweighs any emphasis on profit. This was expressed in axioms such as Alistair's 'professional but not a profession' and an ethos seemingly transmitted over the generations but with discernible origins only traceable to the semi-recent past. Elias points out that 'Representatives of later stages [of social development]...are apt to ignore their own social ancestry and the long process of development leading up to themselves' (Elias 1984[2007]: 121). Certainly tracing such axioms back in time proved difficult for the people I interviewed, explaining them to me by invoking a cover-all 'tradition'. For example, at Conan Doyle & Sons:

Julian: My grandfather's saying was, "Born and bred, not bread and buttered", meaning that it's about family tradition rather than making profits (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 381-4).

Similarly, at R L Stevenson & Son:

George: You know, my father told me, “If it starts being a business, you’re doing it wrong” and I agree. It’s different from the numbers.

Emilia: It’s a delicate balance to maintain: some kind of balance between community, job and firm.

George: That’s it. That’s what we’re doing here. We care about the families and the funerals themselves (Fieldnotes of Interview with G Stevenson 26.6.2014: 265-71).

However, at Kipling’s Funerals, a shorter trajectory was invoked:

Jamie: I’m about funerals, not about profits... and I end up making enough anyway. I’m not the kind of person who needs a lot of money: I always say, “A fiver is a tenner to me!” (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Kipling 11.7.2014: 134-7).

These phrases are all concerned with positioning things other than profit as key. Indeed, Jamie’s comment suggests that openly displaying an interest in profit is taboo, with Julian saying something similar:

Emilia: Has business changed with the Co-op and Dignity’s prominence?

Julian: Dignity doesn’t care about funerals – just the bottom-line profits... Here, it’s a family business, we care about quality and about making the best funerals possible. If I make ... less a year, it doesn’t matter to me because I want to give people the best (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 349-55).

Jamie also commented to me:

Jamie: A lot of funeral directors are all about profits these days. For us, we’d rather do more for a lower cost and give people a really great funeral (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Kipling 11.7.2014: 326-8).

The strong propensity of the independent funeral directors to situate their activities in terms of community service rather than business savvy is closely linked.

Although profit may indicate how well a firm is doing, the directors perceive this as saying nothing about customer satisfaction and a ‘good job’:

Sloan: Dignity is all about the numbers too. They think the numbers mean they’re doing a good job, but they’re not (Fieldnotes of Interview with S Shakespeare 4.6.2014: 199-201).

For the people I interviewed, profit is explained as an indirect outcome of providing quality services over the long term. This is not ‘profit by accident’ or ‘by coincidence’ mentioned earlier, but ‘profits by natural outcome’ because satisfied customers are seen as returning over time and this is what ensures the continuation of business:

Arthur: Yes, we help where we can. And the other thing is – say you help with paying for grandmum’s funeral, or loan them the cash or something, you’ll probably get the rest of the family’s business when the time comes! The combines don’t see things in future terms. It’s all about understanding the past and looking toward the future. You can never live for today in this business. You can shoulder the cost today and lay the foundation for generations of solid business from a family (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Huxley 4.9.2014: 195-202).

Arthur’s comment expresses the rationale behind the independent directors’ approach to staying in business. This is an indirect pursuit of profits and involves degrees of community service. ‘Help now and pave the way for future business’, to paraphrase Arthur, is viewed as the way to build a solid foundation in a given community. There is the underlying assumption of a shared ‘in this business’ and ‘right way’, that profits will surely come later if the firm keeps community-mindedness and quality service at the forefront of its approach. The future-minded character of Arthur’s comment reminds of what Greif argues regarding medieval Maghribi traders: that the traders associated past conduct with future rewards and ‘resisted the short-term gains attainable through deception, since the reduction in future utility resulting from dishonest behavior outweighed the associated increase in present utility’ (Greif 1989: 881). Whether individual funeral firms may otherwise conduct themselves dishonestly in situations lacking foreseeable long-term gains is

not the point here, but rather that ‘solid business’ is seen as the succession of funerals entrusted by generations of a customer-family over time, produced by how they are treated in the present.

Supporting this, Gouillart and Sturdivant (1994) and Bennett (1996) note that successful businesses generally have focused on fostering and improving long-term relationships with customers. This differs from the new business (rather than return business, or market-centric versus customer-centric) emphasis of the conglomerates. It focuses instead on providing quality funerals as the means of ensuring longstanding ties, much like what is termed ‘relationship marketing’ (Christopher et al. 1991; Bennett 1996; Dwyer et al. 1987; Levitt 1983). However, while doing everything in their power to underplay that funeral arrangements involve payment by stressing service and care, many independent funeral firms now ask for part of the cost up front. With recent recessions, consumers saving less per capita and decreasing household expenditure (Crossley et al. 2011), the probability of not being paid for a funeral has increased:

Ted: I once had a funeral – and I won’t name names or anything – in the kind of house where you wipe your feet on the way out, a really dirty house. It’s for someone’s mum who was living off an insurance pay-out and basically drank herself to death. And the son wanted everything: he wants horses, doves, the whole thing. I looked around and think, “How’s he going to pay for all this?”. When I asked, he handed me an insurance cheque saying he’ll pay me with that. So we did the funeral and it was fine but we were never paid. I called him and he said [*imitates the man’s accent*], “What are you going to do, dig her up?”. The man had spent the lot – about £18,000 – in about two weeks. That was the straw that broke the camel’s back so to speak... that’s when we started asking for deposits. We call them ‘security fee’ and ask for 50% or even 100% of the price up front sometimes (Fieldnotes of Interview with T Orwell 30.6.2014: 132-46).

Ted’s story serves as rationale for the firm’s deposit scheme. What is interesting here is that a supporting story is seen as needed to discuss death alongside ‘up front’ money. Independent funeral directors are uncomfortable, at least in their public

comments, about asking for a deposit before beginning the funeral arrangements because this goes against what they stand for:

Ted: I don't like doing it but we have to. We're supposed to be helping the community and not concerning ourselves with profits. I know this isn't about profits, but I still feel bad...but, on the other hand, we need to get paid (Fieldnotes of Interview with T Orwell 30.6.2014: 146-9).

The bottom-line here is that funeral directors 'need to get paid', but they represent their firms as not really concerned with profit. However, Ted's apologetic explanation seems less to do with profits as such and more to do with preserving the image of community-mindedness. For funeral directors, the idea of 'tradition' seems to be at odds with money, although in practice money is obviously needed to continue the business. Tradition is at odds with the appearance of making money, with an interest in money seen as suggesting a lack of genuine caring. And while this of course is a reductive dichotomy in thinking about the funeral firms and their business, it nonetheless exists widely in contemporary society (Zelizer 2005, 2006, 2010; Bailey 2010: 205). The tension underlying asking for money up-front exists because the deposit scheme is understood as undermining the traditional virtues which independent funeral directors promote. Interestingly, funeral firms have avoided the prospect of deposit-schemes for some years, with Arthur recounting to me a story about an occasion a decade earlier when he had proposed deposits at a professional association meeting:

Arthur: At the [local branch] association meeting, when I was president I proposed we should start asking for disbursement upfront. Sloan said, "Oh, I'll never do that." Ten years later, he came up to me, "Arthur, I'll buy you a drink". His friend said, "He's trying to butter you up because he just started asking for disbursements". All the posh funerals, I guess some couldn't pay. And you have to think in those terms to avoid lots of bad debts (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Huxley 4.9.2014: 184-91).

There seems to be an underlying suggestion that deposit schemes have been forced on funeral firms by changed circumstances, alongside the idea that they are not

really interested in money. This is an important part of the ‘traditional values’ framework. The deposit however brings to the surface that funeral firms are indeed businesses and the basis of the work is monetary, something which is bracketed where possible and sanitised as service where not, so as to maintain comfortable ideas about tradition and community.

The deposit scheme is actually a choice, which some funeral firms including Kipling’s Funerals and H Melville & Sons have not adopted. Stepping back from the traditions, sentiments and suggestions of community service, it reduces to money and, deposit scheme or not, funeral firms need stay ‘in the black’. If clients cannot pay, then funeral firms cannot arrange a funeral:

Horace: We’re probably the only ones left that don’t have deposit [schemes]. We don’t have any trouble getting money for funerals. Well, there was one we had to turn down. The funeral was for a guy with no immediate relatives – just nieces and nephews and nobody wanted to pay for the funeral. And a nephew comes in wanting to pay for the funeral with a social security cheque that will be sent 3 months from then and I had to say, “Come back when you have the money”, because he wasn’t going to pay for it himself and nobody else would either.

Emilia: That’s terribly sad.

Horace: Yes... it is awful, but in those cases there’s not much you can do (Fieldnotes of Interview with H, C & A Melville 8.7.2014: 297-308).

Horace’s admission of needing payment for services is more overt than Ted’s earlier suggestion of being forced to ask for deposits, but both are based in excuse-making and the suggestion of having no choice. Although it may be true that a good quality traditional service and high standards in customer care are associated with the longevity of a business, these will do little in the face of bankruptcy.

Arthur maintains, ‘We’ve got tradition. Tradition: we have it. They [the conglomerates] don’t’ (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Huxley 4.9.2014: 174-5). But what does tradition mean in this context? Abstractly, traditions are practices, beliefs and behaviours which persist over time, but in reality it is actually – and necessarily – continually re/invented across the generations (Hobsbawm 2013/1983; Hammer and Lewis 2007). In practice, ‘old-fashioned’ may necessarily contain elements of

the fashionable and current. For the people I interviewed, it amounted to what was presumed to be long-standing funerary customs in their immediate area and a rather vague idea about the practices and sayings of previous generations in the business. I was explicitly told that there are enduring local traditions which longstanding funeral firms are privy to, because the over-time arranging of funerals over generations means they know their market well:

Alex: People around here want – people in [Scottish city] I mean – want something smaller and more dignified; nothing too fancy. I mean, sometimes we'll have one with twelve cars, several hearses and horses, but usually not (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Wilde 1.7.2014: 171-5).

Alex's comment implies but does not deliver an in-depth understanding of the surrounding community – perhaps this is so long-term it has become taken for granted. For independent funeral directors, a deep understanding of local preferences seems to be perceived as elementary in running a good firm:

Julian: Dignity and the Co-op have no idea what the local traditions are.
 Emilia: Maybe the company is too big and too centralised?
 Julian: Exactly. The people they send down here... They sent someone from the north to run a Co-op branch around here and he did away with all the top hats and horses... people around here were confused – everyone wants those with their funerals. He's probably a decent enough director where he's from, but we don't do things like that round here. Every part of the UK has a local funeral tradition and you have to know about them (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 380- 89).

Julian's insistence that local traditions are key links with Tobias's earlier mentioned comment about Dignity's Birmingham call centre. These suggest that local traditions and preferences can only be known and addressed by the established group, the local independent firms. Julian's explanation also seemed very generalised, although perhaps this was because he was speaking with me (an outsider) and wanted to keep things simple. However, such comments add up to the view that a high-quality

funeral requires not just particular skills, but even more so specific knowledge linked to local traditions. Conversely, the conglomerate funeral directors are perceived and explained as outsiders who arbitrarily start arranging funerals without such knowledge, linked with other negative comments which rely on stereotyping the Co-operative especially:

Sloan: Yes, the Co-op has funerals wedged somewhere in with the banking and the grocery and everything. When the old director of Co-operative Funeralcare left, they got the head of their margarine company to take over. Imagine that? (Fieldnotes of Interview with S Shakespeare 4.6.2014: 322-5).

What seems to underlie Sloan's comment is the idea that Co-operative employees, regardless of present position, cannot have prior experience with funerals. In binary terms Sloan's explanation suggests that funeral directing is either a kind of birthright or impossible. The assumption here is that, in order to arrange and direct quality funerals, people must learn all requisite skills from parents and possess a focused work history. Sloan relatedly suggests that a 'good' funeral firm and those who work for them must be focused solely on funerals. Although Sloan was earlier a would-be journalist, he sees such things differently for the Co-operative Funeralcare's new director. This might be because Sloan understands his childhood and adolescence at the family's firm as a key difference, although the same might well be true of the Co-op manager.

Elias argues that 'Each generation selects debris from the past and assembles it in accordance with its own ideals and values into houses of its own kind' (Elias 1969[2006]: 9). For independent funeral directors, 'tradition' seems to imply a succession of fathers (and not mothers) and the passing down, re/invention and re/assemblage of their assumed wisdom. In a profession which prides itself on the passing down and preservation of so-called traditional qualities, how much do its workers really know about the firm's past? For instance, Sloan explained to me that W Shakespeare & Son was established in 1885, but that the firm is actually not sure about the exact date, so they chose that year 'because it sounds nice' (Fieldnotes of Interview with S Shakespeare 4.6.2014: 73-6). The date of establishment, which represents legitimacy by longevity, is easily locatable if facts actually matter to a

firm. Sloan's comment encouraged me to wonder what else has been forgotten and whether such facts have any great importance anyway. Alan and Lily similarly comment on the lost nature of facts about at R L Stevenson & Son's past:

Alan: Probably there's nobody who could tell you anyway.
 Lily: Right, right everybody's dead!
 Alan: [*Chuckles*] "Deceased".
 Lily: Do you know? We should've sat my father down and got [him] to tell us all about his —
 Alan: — But we never knew—
 Lily: — And that, but we never...
 Emilia: Yes —
 Lily: — And he never told you anything, like, so you didn't really —
 Alan: — Even you ask him and he didn't really —
 Lily: — Yes. We never ever, like, sat down and talked when he was younger
 (Transcript of Interview with L, A & T Stevenson 22.7.2014: 73-86).

How many of the 'traditional' services that funeral firms provide have extensive historical roots and how much has been reworked in terms of what 'sounds nice' in the present? Whilst 'tradition' invokes ideas of important practices transcending the generations, 'nice' is constantly reformulated in terms of the present and it could be argued that explanations and business-oriented displays of tradition in firms mesh the former into the latter: tradition as something that sounds nice.

In sum, the habituses of the independent funeral firms vary, but share in being persistence-oriented, and the measures supporting this necessitate tradition. However, the origins and developments of these traditions are not important to the funeral directors nor to their customers; traditions simply are, in any particular present moment. Also I doubt that anyone I interviewed would find tradition important if it was not associated with furthering their business. Tradition is part of the character that independent funeral directors perform while arranging funerals and the point here is its utility, its marketing value and the association with legitimacy. The directors have a limited idea of what their firm's traditions are – they simply explain that 'it's tradition' and leave it there. This also may often be the case in general terms: the average person has as little knowledge of the origins of Christmas

traditions, explaining this in terms of ‘it’s tradition’. It is notable that tradition is re/invented continually using such vague references to the past, but conceived in terms of a particular present (Hobsbawm 2013/1983; Hammer and Lewis 2007). This echoes Elias’s (1984[2007], 1989[2011], 1987[2010]) comments about habitus as imperceptible and with an air-like quality, although problematising his idea of it concretely transcending the generations. Perhaps, then, habitus is an imperceptible yet particular way of ‘being a firm’ and tradition is a sort of glue for this.

So far I have not focused on what habitus adds up to for independent funeral directors. When I asked them about their ideas about what is ‘normal’ and their understandings of ‘proper’ work practices, I received decidedly we-centric answers, based in notions of ‘the firm’, ‘us’ and ‘who we are’. What resulted about the we-beliefs and we-behaviours of funeral directors within a firm suggested an over-time homogeneity that seems improbable. Considering in Eliasian terms that the present is gradually built out of the past, it is unlikely that groups of people will continue going about their work in the same ways with little change over the long term, and with their belief and behaviour traditions remaining more-or-less intact over time. What is more probable is that the funeral directors’ comments about ‘who we are’ are conceived in the now or now-past and attributed to earlier periods and legitimise the firm and the things the funeral directors had to say about their present everyday beliefs and practices, including as if shared generally by all members of the firm.

The funeral directors’ we-centred comments also meant it was difficult to prise apart ‘the funeral director’ and ‘the firm’, which in turn raises questions about ‘the firm’ over time as a figuration. Although I was talking with individuals about a firm, the independent funeral directors took it a step further in presenting themselves as part of this shared machine. Each of the people I spoke with undoubtedly possess ‘their own’ opinions about their work, these were usually repackaged in terms of ‘we’ and ‘the firm’. Why did most of them do this? Why did they talk about the firm as though an entity unto itself, and to what effect? How can they rationalise this when all they say underscores that the employees co-construct and so perpetuate it over time? Elias argues for the inexorable interdependence of people and figurations, but where funeral firms are concerned can the figuration be ‘seen’ apart from the

people and practices comprising it at particular points in time? I will discuss these and other important aspects more thoroughly in the next section.

IV. The Trouble with Using Habitus

This chapter started with key points in Elias's conception of habitus. Following this, it discussed the behaviours and practices of independent funeral directors which were referenced in their accounts as shared within and between their firms.

Discussion of these has so far centred around matters of everyday work based on the funeral directors' accounts. Here I shall build on this in presenting habitus as the funeral directors understand it, and also using Elias's ideas as a counterpoint. In doing so, discussion will explore key differences and similarities between Elias's and the funeral directors' conceptions of habitus.

Once again I have struggled in coming to terms with the actualities of contextualised habitus in my analysis. I continued finding myself attempting to apply, forgetting that Elias's ideas and their use are contextually located and should not be superimposed in other research contexts. Initially I found it difficult to grasp the funeral directors' profound departures from Elias's way of thinking about habitus, as much of what they conveyed to me seemed to map onto Elias's view. But then I realised that I had been thinking of habitus as though a thing. 'The habitus is there', I thought, overlooking what Elias emphasised about its elusive and air-like qualities. Elias did not interview people, with his data generally taken from historical documents and ideas conceived abstractly from these. His several works using interview data involved John Scotson and others carrying them out (Elias and Scotson 1965[2008]; Goodwin and O'Connor 2015a). Learning about a group's habitus is very different when talking with people. For one, people's accounts are generally present-time accounts and not retrospective. Another is, in the case of documents – etiquette books, for example – the 'shoulds' and 'should nots' are more neatly laid out than they are when people talk about them. A third is that over-time developments in shared beliefs and behaviours are discernible when reading many such sources in date order, whereas people provide information which is generally limited by their lifespans, memories and existing knowledge. Although drawing on interviews has its own drawbacks, I question whether and how the information in

etiquette books and other documentary sources can illuminate the presumed ‘real’ processes at work in a figuration over time, as ideas about the ‘normal’, ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ proliferate at un/even rates and are manifested differently in different groups. However, such sources seem to evade reverting to presentist thinking because not limited to people’s ideas which are often decidedly ‘now’ in character.

From his research and informed by the contexts he investigated, Elias understands habitus as the beliefs, behaviours, traditions and practices which a figuration comes to embody over time, and which develops in the way of sedimented layers over the *longue durée* (Elias 1989a[2013]: 24). Understanding that people are bound up in figurations which are interconnected with each other and together compose society, the Eliasian concept of habitus refers to a shared set of assumptions and thinking which are ‘second nature’ or ‘embodied social learning’ that comes into use through interpersonal interaction over time, and which may outlast any one period in a figuration’s lifespan (Dunning and Mennell 1996: ix; Elias 1939[2012], 1989a[2013]). The habitus of a figuration builds at un/even rates upon what came before in un/even and un/foreseen ways, but nevertheless has its basis in things past. For Elias, then, habitus is a set of shared ideas that is continually re/developing through use over time, and comes to have many imperceptible ties to different past eras. However, exploring the belief and behaviour traditions of members of independent funeral firms has presented a rather different conception of habitus than Elias’s.

The independent funeral directors conveyed habitus in terms of a largely unchanging set of beliefs, traditions and practices that are equally shared by and embodied in all members of their funeral firm over time. ‘The firm’ here denotes all of the member-employees at any given point in time, perhaps like ‘the court’ distinguishes members of nobility and state in Elias’s (1969[2006], 1939[2012]) work on societies. ‘The firm’, much like Elias’s use of the figuration, is invoked to mean all employees at work. However, in the case of the firm, over-time changes in employee composition, broad social shifts and key influences are seen to have little or no impact on its essence. Although the funeral directors did comment on the possibility of folding, ‘the firm’ was represented in conversation as something that

endures and remains, regardless of whatever or whoever may change. Several aspects of habitus are striking in the funeral directors' accounts.

First, the independent directors' accounts assume there is one shared habitus uniting all members of a firm, and this relatedly suggests that there is no discord or conflict arising between members. Instead, depictions of generations of employees harmoniously working together, caring for one another and sharing in the same values and goals were presented to me. Because of this and the ways in which the funeral directors relatedly conveyed personal opinions in terms of 'we' 'us' and 'the firm', I later found myself referring to particular funeral directors' comments in terms of 'the firm thinks...'.

Earlier I posed the question of why the funeral directors refer to 'the firm' as though synonymous with 'the funeral director'. I think the answer is that funeral directors wish to portray themselves as the embodiment of their businesses and all employees as united within it in a structured, seamless and uniform way. Work situations do not often play out so harmoniously and places of business do not comprise sets of identically-thinking people. While Elias seems to assume that a group of people develop a shared habitus, in practice this way of thinking can lead to downplaying the role of routine levels of in-group differences and conflicts, and also that some firms may be marked by dissent. For example, the offer to purchase G Orwell Funeral Services discussed in the previous chapter caused a major rift in Ted's family, and is a main reason why he is now the only family member working at the firm (Fieldnotes of Interview with T Orwell 30.6.2014: 180-99). After all, funeral firms are businesses comprising groups of employees who are brought together to do a job. When one thinks of a family, the loving and supportive archetype may come to mind, but in reality many families are nothing like this. The same can be said of funeral firms: group cohesion and shared habitus cannot be assumed, although firm directors frequently suggest their firms function archetypically in cohesive ways. Realistically speaking, people in work settings do not always have shared goals or understandings of how best to perform tasks, and working well as a team may or may not foster shared understandings among a group of employees. Group dynamics develop over time, and a group may unite in facing situations where an external conflict or shared goal arises, something discussed later.

There are also variations across how different members of a firm have lived out beliefs and behaviours. Although people are bound together within the firm figuration, this does not remove the likelihood of them having varying opinions, ideas and approaches to doing the work within the confines of the prevailing 'correct' ways. However, the idea that a funeral firm has one habitus shared equally among all is what I was continually told in interviews, and for this reason I continue to refer to the firm's habitus in the singular to represent the independent funeral directors' views.

Second, although suggesting that they have the freedom to address their work on a case-by-case basis, the independent funeral directors nevertheless seem to make the same routine choices. They also have highly similar opinions about the 'correct' ways of behaving and doing their work, which are also reportedly passed down from paternal ancestors. Considering the accounts of all the independent funeral directors I interviewed, the we-images conveyed of 'the firm' share much in common, particularly with regard to their understandings of 'right' and 'wrong' work practices. In other words, if variation within firms is assumed regardless of the suggested homogeneity, elements of each funeral director's habitus are nevertheless still shared among members of their firms, as well as among the other independent firms where I interviewed.

Third, there are elements of stasis to the 'who we are' and 'how we do things' aspects of the funeral directors' accounts. In commenting about these characteristics of habitus as they pertain to the present, the people I spoke with implied that the shared values, beliefs and practices of their firms have endured in largely or completely unchanged ways over many generations. However, the examples the funeral directors gave to support this were decidedly presentist or at most pertaining to the recent past. As argued in the previous chapter, the independent funeral directors claim strong ties to a long-running historical tradition, but seem to know very little about the particulars of the history involved. In the case of habitus, the funeral directors are not concerned with questions of what-came-from-where, but are more interested in what it amounts to at present and how it is useful in continuing the business.

How is it possible for so many independent funeral directors, some of whom are strangers to one another, to think in such like-minded ways, and how have they come to present their we-identities and shared beliefs and practices in such similar terms? Why do they emphasise stasis in their accounts of shared beliefs and behaviours at their firms? Answers relating to this latter question were considered in the previous chapter in discussion of invented traditions, and I argued there that the independent funeral directors have an interest in portraying their firms as persisting over the long term for reasons pertaining to ensuring their firms' continued longevity. Building on this, the first question above also concerns their interest in keeping the firm in business. A key factor is that their broadly shared ideas about 'right' and 'wrong', although presented as if existing always, largely relate to recent conflicts with outsiders.

I arrived at this conclusion in thinking about the independent funeral directors' accounts and their views of the conglomerate firms. More specifically, I noticed that the independent directors' ingrained rules, 'shoulds' and 'absolutely nots' bloomed out of their accounts of what the conglomerate directors are doing 'incorrectly'. Witnessing this across many of the interviews, relatedly they are becoming more reflexive and aware of their firm habitus throughout the course of their perceived struggle against the conglomerates, and in particular that elements of their habitus are becoming more discernible through comparison. In discussing the perceived shortcomings of the conglomerate funeral directors, the independent directors made a range of comparisons which illuminated more about their firms and about being an independent director than anything else and led them to articulate this. However, outside of such comparative discussions, habitus was less discernible, more 'airy'. Asking the independent funeral directors about their firm's rules, for example, resulted in responses such as, 'we have no rules' and 'we manage our firms as we see fit on a case-by-case basis'. But as I have demonstrated, they do have many ingrained ideas about the correct ways of doing the work, and these are perhaps easier for them to explain in contrast with the outsiders. A firm's habitus and the elements shared by the independent directors I interviewed suggest that these aspects of their belief and behaviour traditions were previously second-nature and unnoticed, and were recently advanced by invented elements.

Many of the independent directors I interviewed would not have devoted considerable thought to ideas about what signifies and differentiates their firms from the others before it became instrumental to do so. This is not to imply that they do not consider or theorise about their everyday realities, but that their busy work-lives do not often accommodate non-essential ponderings. But now there is necessity for re/forming concise we-ideas, predicated upon winning the battle with the conglomerates and thus continuing in business. Elias (1950[2007]) suggests similar processes at work in his naval profession studies and elsewhere, but I would add here that people do not often engage in this kind of evaluative thinking about what is shared between their group members (or for that matter who is in their groups) unless there is a good reason for it. And good reasons may include uniting against a common enemy, solving a shared problem or pursuing some common objective, all aspects which Elias found to be at play in his uses of habitus. Without a uniting reason, work environments are generally characterised by employees completing given tasks and having what they perceive to be their own styles of working but with some similarities across that largely go unnoticed. As such, perhaps the habitus only becomes noticeable or is accentuated where there is ‘good reason’; and there is always the possibility that elements of it have been recently invented to address the good reason to hand.

If I had interviewed the same independent funeral directors in the early 1980s, before the conglomerate firms³ entered the market in a way that became a cause for concern, they probably would not have conveyed the same kinds of detailed ideas about ‘who we are’ – because such group information about ‘who we are’ seems to have been formed recently to convey to customers that their firms are the optimal choice. The perceived struggle to maintain dominance in the funeral industry only extends back some thirty-five years and over this short period independent directors seem to have developed or realised aspects of their firms’ habituses which unite them all against their conglomerate competitors. Having become aware of (or having invented) key aspects of their shared habitus through this perceived conflict, the independent funeral directors seem to have harnessed its marketing capacities, with

³ Although co-operative societies have offered funeral services for many decades prior to the 1980s, the arrival of large foreign interests (particularly SCI and Plantsbrook) seem to have tipped the scales.

‘who we are’ having developed into a set of reasons to choose an independent firm for funerals. Independent firms are the optimal choice because they have these values, because they have kept and protected these values ‘always’, and because they have long-running experience which the conglomerates are seen to lack. Elias wrote that the individual can neither be considered separately from the group nor from society (Elias 1987[2010]: 139-45, 1983[2007]: 99), and habitus in this particular context also re/forms in this reciprocal We-I way. In this case, the figuration of all independent funeral firms is coming to have a range of decidedly similar shared beliefs and behaviours through the ongoing perceived battle with the conglomerates. This is self-and-other on an inter-group level, contributing to the developments of both these figurations and their subset figurations in terms of one another. Aboard a naval ship with Elias (2007a), we watch the gentlemen and seamen disagree on many aspects of the work, and we see the two groups band together against another. They may not have had much reason to unite before, but now they do and through this shared struggle they begin to find commonalities between them as a group which are then accentuated through this process of intermingling. The struggle has likewise encouraged the independent funeral firms to unite around a set of ideas they agree ‘should’ be preserved – ideas which contribute to ensuring the collective longevity of their businesses.

Given these contextualised conclusions, habitus is a shared set of behaviours and beliefs which becomes most discernible where there is a ‘good reason’ that pushes aspects of it to the fore. Elias’s most focused studies of habitus involve elements of discord, tension and conflict between groups, and several of his key findings are also true of independent funeral firms. Specifically, Elias argued that conflict and clashes of habitus contribute to the development of professions (Elias 2007a), the gradual internalisation of manners and behaviours (Elias 1939[2012], 1969[2006]), increasing in-group uniformity and quests to achieve supremacy (Elias and Scotson 1965[2008]; Elias 1989a[2013]). The key departure from Elias’s conceptions of habitus is that the independent funeral directors are not able to account for its long-running development (and are not concerned with this anyway), but explain and understand it in terms of the present so that it is unclear to what extent their shared habitus has been invented recently. And broadly speaking, habitus

is most easily discernible in circumstances of conflict, which is something Elias demonstrates in many of his studies.

But what do the discussions add up to? So far I have explored figuration, sociogenesis and habitus in context. In the next chapter, I will examine 'the bigger picture' according to the independent funeral directors and compare and contrast this with Elias's bigger picture of social development developed in his work on de/civilising processes.

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Chapter Five

Guardians of Civility? Independent Funeral Directors and their De/Civilising Processes

Alan: The level of service you receive from everybody else has changed... the level of service you get from doctors, ministers, crematoriums, cemeteries has massively gone downhill... now, basically, if you die after 5 o'clock on a Friday, nobody wants to know 'til Monday morning 9 o'clock (Transcript of Interview with L, A & T Stevenson 22.7.2014: 1105-8, 1115-6).

'If one comes face to face, behind the more impersonal façade, with people struggling, often in vain, to adjust their inherited institutional framework with all its incongruities to what they feel to be their own needs, then the atmosphere so often surrounding old institutions in history books – the atmosphere of museum pieces – evaporates. In that respect, the people of the past are on a par with us; or rather we with them' (Elias 1950[2007]: 29).

I. Elias and the De/Civilising Process

i. introduction

Elias's theory of the civilising process encompasses all of the conceptual ideas discussed in earlier chapters, with its complexities coming into sharper relief by means of the range of examples he used to explore it over his lifetime. Because of this, this chapter engages in a more detailed return to Elias's theory than the two previous ones. The explanation for this is that the civilising process is the most

significant aspect of Elias's work and it brings together other aspects and ideas discussed throughout this thesis. Relatedly, Elias's *On the Process of Civilisation* (1939[2012]) continues to be considered his most widely known contribution to sociology and his 'magnum opus' (Mennell 1990b: 156; Bauman 1979: 121; Landini 2013: 20). It is where he first spells out his theory of the civilising process, but as I will show, this is a theory he continued to develop throughout his subsequent work.

Elias's attention to the interdependence of the shifting relationship existing between civilising and decivilising trends come to the fore more clearly in his later works, but is nevertheless there from the start (Dunning and Mennell 1998), as is what Árnason (1989) considers to be Elias's aim of developing a general theory of power (Árnason 1989: 45-7). In tandem with what Elias terms the 'polyphony of history' (Elias 1939[2012]: 274) and so to emphasise the interdependence of civilising and decivilising shifts, Dunning and Mennell (1998) refer to the 'de-civilizing process', Powell (2007) to the '(de)civilizing process', and Rohloff (2013) to the 'de/civilising process'. As such, I follow in this tradition by referring to 'the de/civilising process' rather than considering civilising and decivilising as separable trends.

What follows is organised in the same way as the two previous chapters, in that it starts by delineating the framework of Elias's ideas and changes over time around this most central aspect of his work. It then discusses material from my interviews, and like the previous two chapters, this is neither an exercise in applying Elias's ideas nor an attempt to fit the independent funeral directors' accounts into an Eliasian framework. Elias was absolutely right in recognising that the situation, context, the stage of development and the particular group of people involved all make differences. Therefore, my aim continues to be to understand the differences made, in this case by exploring the bigger picture of change according to the funeral directors.

ii. three phases in Elias's thinking

While Elias seemed to already have had clear ideas about the de/civilising process in his earliest published works (Schöttker 1998), it is a theory he carried with him and refined over his life, developing and honing its component concepts and possibilities

over the course of more than fifty years. Contingent on his view that history and sociology are unquestionably interdependent but have undergone a detrimental separation in the recent past (Elias 1989a[2013]: 77, 4n, 1970[2008]: 105-6, 1974[2008]: 127-8), Elias's theory of the de/civilising process relies upon a processual view of development wherein everything new builds on everything previous, and in which some things change, but some persist over time. He explained this in terms of assemblages, remarking that 'This procedure reminds us of the way people build houses of their own, in the style of their own time, from the ruins of buildings from earlier periods' (Elias 1969[2006]: 8-9). Taking Elias's theory of the de/civilising process as a microcosm of his views about processual development, some aspects of his original ideas about the de/civilising process persisted in his over-time conceptualisation while others diminished in importance. Haferkamp (1987) makes a comparison between the 'old' Elias of the 1950s and the 'new' Elias of the 1970s and 1980s, suggesting a fundamental difference between his older and newer works because of a shift in focus from intra-state to inter-state processes (Haferkamp 1987: 546-7). However, Mennell argues that Haferkamp 'greatly exaggerates the discontinuity' between 'old' and 'new' Elias, and also notes that thinking in terms of categorical shifts engenders false polarities which Elias himself was against (Mennell 1987b: 559). Featherstone also notes a 'remarkable consistency' across Elias's work, with many ideas developed in his later work already present in his early writing (Featherstone 1987: 199). Combining aspects of these arguments, it is more helpful to consider that in each of Elias's studies, the particulars of the subject matter guided how the de/civilising process was used, and as such different aspects of the theory come to the fore at different points. Furthermore Elias, being a human being, learned from each use of his theory of the de/civilising process throughout the course of his life, and his interests in its uses were also focused through this.

Perhaps the most straightforward way to think about the development of the theory of the de/civilising process is to consider it in terms of Elias's thinking over time. Thus regarding Haferkamp's (1987) argument about Elias's shift in focus, I would instead argue that his 'bigger picture' ideas about inter-state processes were built upon ideas derived from his earlier intra-state studies. Understanding these as

building over time, developments in Elias's theory of the de/civilising process can be discerned by conceiving them in terms of a series of interconnected questions which gradually build together, but with what I see as three particular phases being discernible. Although I present these as 'phases', developments in Elias's thinking about the de/civilising process are by no means disjointed and distinct from one another, but rather are overlapping and interwoven. Given Elias's long career and his approach being so responsive to context, it is helpful to discuss broad trends in his thinking. However this exercise will not follow in the tradition of claiming an 'altogether' type continuity or a set of first-this-then-that changes across Elias's works. I refer to phases for lack of a better term, and readers should note both the consistencies across Elias's over-time thinking and how things build and re/develop through his contextual uses of ideas.

Regarding the first broad phase, from the 1920s to the mid-1960s, Elias's focus over this period was on the formation and development of particular conventions within groups and how these came into common use. Elias seems to have begun with a particular understanding of social development that he termed sociogenesis, discussed in an earlier chapter, which denotes an amalgamation of interwoven long-term social processes (Elias 1939[2012]: 127-8). In turn, this changed and reformed over the course of his life as a researcher. Each study Elias undertook was an attempt to understand aspects of de/civilising processes from new vantage-points, and reading each study in turn informs understanding how context guides theory and the use of concepts for him. With his interest in demonstrating a long-term processual view of social development and how it manifests in the internalised behaviours of people, and wanting a broadly applicable example to explore (Elias 1969[2006]: 5), Elias initially focused on European court societies. His wide-ranging reading (Elias 1984b[2013]: 117-19) and varied educational background (Goudsblom 1987a: 323) led him to the idea that, within any given nation or community, there is a superordinate group of people, and they have a particular way of doing things. He also arrived at the view that historical documents appear to be 'the only reliable thing' (Elias 1969[2006]: 8) and that, conversely, historical accounts often present problematic depictions of past 'reality', because 'Contemporary circumstances decide *how* [a person] sees "history", and even *what* he sees as "history"' (Elias

1969[2006]: 8). He also concluded that the past can only be understood in terms of the materials which remain (Elias 1969[2006]:7-9). Elias here focused his attention around etiquette books from past centuries, commenting that they were instructive because they detailed, without historians' intrusive and static interpretations, how aspects as diminutive as manners come into practice, take root, persist and disperse within and throughout a society (Elias 1969[2006]: 10).

The development, internalisation and spread of manners became a crucial focus in Elias's first published work, *On the Process of Civilisation* (1939[2012]). Haferkamp (1987) points out that 'the story of how Norbert Elias's work came to be written and published is a complicated one' (Haferkamp 1987: 546). And likewise it should be noted here that, although this was Elias's first published, it was not his first written work. In fact, the first major work he wrote was *The Court Society* (Elias 1969[2006]), in its present form adapted from his 1933 Habilitation thesis and published as a book thirty-six years later (Mennell 2006: xi; Morrow 2009: 217).¹ Both of these works highlight a developmental trend involving the dispersal of manners originally adopted in court settings spreading outward to the 'lower strata' and eventually taking root as part of 'civilised' social interaction. The class-based disposition of manners was of great interest to Elias, not only because it gave evidence as to how and why there were sometimes sharp separations between different groups within a society, but also because it denoted the uneven and gradual character of long-term social change (Mennell 1984). This is the first hint of what later became his attention to established-outsider relationships (Elias and Scotson 1965[2008]), which is implicit in his early works but nevertheless there.

In this earlier writing, Elias was interested in how prescribed manners take hold and affect a particular society, and why it is that people's actions and their thinking come to change when they become part of a particular group of people. He arrived at the conclusion that, although often considered as separate, people's social and psychological elements are in fact connected and this psycho-social interdependence is bound to a particular stage in social development and state-

¹ It is unclear what has been added given later reflection, but the continuities between this work and *On the Process of Civilisation* are clear.

formation. For Elias, this interdependence was clear, because of the developing avoidance of shame, embarrassment and harm in the ways that people comport themselves within a new social group setting, and also how they come to act in general. There is no way to prove that the psyche develops in terms of the collective, but there are instances which show individual people's seemingly ingrained actions changing in terms of the social structure which they come to help comprise. Elias concluded that, in order for such manners to become ingrained within a group, the ways in which people regulate their own behaviours and actions, and also the ways in which they come to understand their lives and surroundings, must be interdependent.

Understanding the relationship between external constraints and self-regulatory behaviours to be key in the development of social frameworks, it then followed for Elias to ask what motivates people to conform in these situations. His answer was that the quest for status and also maintenance of a dichotomy between notions of 'civility' and 'barbarism' developed in tandem with prescribed etiquette. And this was accompanied by tensions associated with the threat of shame, ostracism or punishment fuelling this process of internalising and performing prescribed manners within groups. Elias wrote, '... people, in the course of the civilising process, have sought to suppress in themselves everything that they feel to be of an "animalic character"' (Elias 1939[2012]: 122). It seemed as if 'superior' groups tend to develop in terms of a subordinate 'other' that is considered undesirable by contrast. Within a society, every group understands itself as 'civilised' and has its own developing understanding of what is 'civilised', and this has an amalgamating effect within groups, while constituting 'others' outside this.

From his studies of court societies, Elias noticed that the stringent framework of 'civilised' manners was connected to a particular in-group understanding of membership, which he called *habitus* (Elias 1939[2012]: 208, 405, 467, 1969[2006]: 102, 262, 299-301, 1984[2007]: 16-17, 110-19, 1989a[2013]: 3-4), also discussed in an earlier chapter. This involves what Elias would later describe as an established-outsider relationship (Elias and Scotson 1965[2008]), wherein members of the court are the established, and their hierarchic power is derived from decivilising the 'other', the outsiders. In adhering to and internalising prescribed manners, court

members considered themselves to be the apex of civility. Likewise, those who were not privy to these manners were ‘othered’ and by contrast considered barbaric.

By degrees, Elias also began to understand the role of conflict in maintaining as well as developing group behaviours, and later this involved him making multi-group comparisons. What happens when groups of different kinds (or classes) of people are forced to work with one another? Elias’s studies of the British naval profession (Elias 2007a) brought forward the role of conflict and competition between two groups, military gentlemen and seamen, who possessed different class status as well as different habituses with entrenched work traditions, understandings and manners. The scenario at work in the development of the naval profession involved two equally represented groups whose clashes were situated in habitus-based differences. Both groups were forced to work together and the threat of disobeying Royal decrees may have hindered disastrous outcomes from this. Elias (2007a) concluded that the over-time near feud between seamen and military gentlemen had a profound influence over the development of the naval profession in Britain, and more broadly speaking that conflict contributes to the formation and development of institutions.

Elias’s studies of group dynamics continued thereafter, emphasising different facets of the de/civilising process in accordance with each research setting and the available materials for investigating it. Then, having secured a post at Leicester in 1954 at the age of fifty-seven, Elias may have thought that his approach to sociology would finally be welcomed and put to use. However, as evidenced by the ‘Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations and Adult Roles’ Project (1962-1964) and other materials uncovered by Goodwin and O’Connor (2001, 2002, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009, 2015a, 2015b; O’Connor and Goodwin 2004, 2012), Elias’s process sociological thinking was still ‘othered’ within the academic context, although there are clearly exceptions given his close relationships with a good many figures in sociology of the day, in particular at Leicester Ilya Neustadt and Eric Dunning (and interesting discussions of these relationships can be found in Goodwin and Hughes 2011; Mennell 1990b; Brown 1987; Kilminster 1987; Schöttker 1998). This seems to have been a turning point, as from the mid-1960s onward his studies gave more focused attention to matters of in-group inclusion and perceived problems

with established sociological methodology of that era. This began with his use of John Scotson's Master's Thesis data to do his own study, later published under both names as *The Established and the Outsiders* (Elias and Scotson 1965[2008]). I would propose that Elias had always considered himself an outsider, but thought belonging to a department and having a junior research team might change this. When he realised his ideas were not welcomed by his research team, however, his agenda changed.

The Established and the Outsiders focuses on the question of what happens when a new group comes into close proximity with a pre-existing established group, and concerns the ways in which the latter exerts and maintains dominance. Drawing on his ideas of in-group habitus as well as emerging systems of rules – both of which are important in his earlier work as well – Elias demonstrated how a group (the Village) maintains the status quo in situations where a new group of people (the Estate) are seen to threaten its previously superordinate position. Recalling the stringent rules at play in court societies, and perhaps also reflections on his own situation within academia, Elias argued that 'It was not only that newcomers had to observe the Village standards, but they also had to make a point of showing that they observed them. Otherwise, they were given a low ranking in the status order of Village families and treated as outsiders' (Elias and Scotson 1965[2008]: 78). Relying on his presupposition that understanding the present necessitates study of the past, as well as his focus on within-group conformity and the quest for status, Elias's study of established-outsider relationships took his theory of interpersonal interdependence several steps further by demonstrating that individuals cannot independently alter community judgements or standards, and that interdependent relationships are crucial to the foundation and maintenance of status and power (Eyerman 1995; Collison 1965). The differences between this study and that of the British navy (Elias 2007a) also underscores the role of context and that social interactions depend on the particular stage of development in which they are taking place.

Strains of exclusion and disagreement concerning sociology were also manifest in Elias's writing after retiring from Leicester (for discussion of this, see Coser 1980 and Featherstone 1987: 199). Around this time, an emerging second phase of his

writing can be discerned. From the late 1960s to mid-1980s, Elias's focus was on considering problems with the sociological discipline of his day, with him suggesting alternative ways of thinking that would address these problems, and then in turn further developing the concepts composing his theory of the de/civilising process. After his only known attempt to undertake a group-based research project had 'failed' (Goodwin and O'Connor 2015a, 2015b), and his subsequent demonstration of how his approach does work with similar data in *The Established and the Outsiders* (Elias and Scotson 1965[2008]), Elias's writing came to encompass a differently-focused set of questions. This phase in his work suggests a detachment or stepping back from the de/civilising process to delineate broader characteristics involved in long-term processual approaches to social change, and relatedly how his own process sociology might impact other approaches to sociological inquiry. Many of the more elusive characteristics found in his earlier work, such as the individual-society relationship, the role of tension, power ratios and habitus, as well as some emerging ideas such as the We-I balance, the role of myth and un/planned outcomes, come to the fore. Elias's *What is Sociology?* (1970), *Involvement and Detachment* (1983) and *The Society of Individuals* (1987) were critical in demonstrating and promoting the ground-breaking character of process sociology as well as enumerating issues with sociological concepts and methods of the day. The central objective of these works concerns what was wrong with the sociological discipline; and the underlying notion here is that, in order for sociologists to understand the importance of Elias's approach and how it works, they had to fundamentally change the ways in which they go about thinking and researching.

Perhaps the first and greatest problem according to Elias is a problem in thinking. In particular, he argues that current social scientific approaches separate individuals from one another and from society by presupposing them as disjointed entities (Elias 1970[2012]: 7-27, 1983[2007]: 18, 1984[2007]: 71-2, 20, 39, 1987[2010]: 54). Established sociological approaches relatedly presuppose what Elias terms the *homo clausus*, and thereby the 'we-less I', rather than thinking of society in terms of a precarious We-I balance (Elias 1987[2010]: 178-80, 1970[2012]: 24, 1983[2007]: 19). For him, not only are individuals and society interdependent, but they also cannot be separated by any means or for any reason.

Consequently, Elias understands society as composed of individuals (Elias 1987[2010]: 5, 9, 19). Furthermore, much sociology separates subjects of interest into categories which stand apart from people and this results in reducing relationships to dichotomies or polarities and presupposing individual agency, with Goudsblom (1987a) providing a concise summary of Elias's views on this. These practices promote an increasingly evident me-centric view of society (Elias 1987[2010]: 140), mirrored in an individual-centric approach to sociological investigation. Elias charted individualisation as a civilising trend over the course of time (Elias 1969[2006]: 262, 1939[2012]: 515, 488-9) and he notes that, as society develops, people will increasingly retreat into themselves (Elias 1983[2007]: 9, 165). However, where sociological inquiry is concerned, society cannot actually be disarticulated in these ways for investigative purposes.

A further problem with sociology of Elias's day was the propensity to focus on the present (Elias 1987a[2009]: 107-9, 1977[2009]: 20-28). The separation between history and sociology, which Elias saw as an emerging trend (Elias 1969[2006]: 1-38), undermined the abilities of both disciplines to discern the 'actual' processes of how things develop over time. Instead of conceiving sociology and history as interrelated and both studying social processes, Elias argued that academia had sequestered history to the disjointed past and sociology to the static present (Elias 1987a[2009]: 226; Mennell 2007: 320-21). In avoiding static qualities he considered as misappropriated from the natural sciences, Elias asserted that the task of sociology is to understand the complexities of interdependent networks of people over time and, 'To make these blind, uncontrolled processes more accessible to human understanding' (Elias 1970[2012]: 149). Essentially, the task of sociology is to examine over-time processes and therefore also to incorporate as central to it, 'historical sociology' rather than one-off connections within the bounded present. And the de/civilising process is necessary for these purposes.

Having enumerated the problems with sociology of his day and delineated a need for an alternative perspective, Elias's focus turned to establishing his theory of the de/civilising process as foundational, rather than as just a means for understanding changes for particular groups. In broadening his perspective, Elias's writing over this period suggests the increased possibilities for perceiving the

de/civilising process as a generally applicable theory of social development. He emphasises and demonstrates through example how processual approaches in general and focuses on de/civilising in particular help to circumvent ontological dualisms, categorical stasis, ego-centric models and many other perceived issues regarding sociological methodology (Elias 1970[2012]: 48-51, 148-9, 1983[2007]: 99, 113, 34). Elias does this first by always treating the individual and society as inextricable parts of the same whole, as discussed in previous chapters. His approach also warns against methodologies which impose categories on observed data, or else understand social phenomena in terms of dichotomous either/or relationships, again discussed earlier.

Regarding earlier key conceptual threads which are underscored through his studies of de/civilising in the second phase of his work, Elias's earlier description of sociogenesis emphasised in passing the transitional qualities of society (Elias 1939[2012]: 79, 1970[2012]: 140-47), and he depicted society as having stages of development characterised by persistent trends (Elias 1939[2012]: 5, 502-3, 1969[2006]: 252-3, 237-8). His earlier work also hinted at the directionality of change, emphasising that this is not unilinear (Elias 1939[2012]: 423). With regard to his concept of figuration, Elias's earlier work also conceived the relationships between people as being organised in terms of 'webs of chains of action' (Elias 1939[2012]: 407). He noted that people have greater degrees of interdependence over time (Elias 1939[2012]: 408), that these webs of relationships become denser over time (Elias 1939[2012]: 286), that it is impossible for individuals to change things for everybody else (Elias and Scotson 1965[2008]: 77-9, 108), and that a change in one aspect cannot account for the entire process of social change (Elias 1939[2012]: 139). Elias does not, however, discuss in detail where a figuration 'begins' and 'ends', and how its boundaries are defined. He instead explains figuration as constituted by its members at any given point in time (Elias 1970[2012]). Elias also pointed out that planned actions often result in unintended outcomes, given the ways in which people are organised in society (Elias 1939[2012]: 403). Because people do not live in total isolation, and are in fact indivisibly bound together with one another by their re/forming social relationships, their actions and aims in any given situation are organised in terms of the 'webs of

chains of interdependent actions' which they help comprise (Elias 1939[2012]: 405-7). With many varying actions and aims at work in a given scenario, the outcome regardless of planning is always by different degrees uncertain. Elias uses the example of games, noting that the collective aim is to win, but the ways in which individual players interact in order to achieve this presents unpredictable results (Elias 1970[2012]: 90-95).

Throughout the second phase of his work, Elias also further developed various of the supporting concepts in his earlier work on the de/civilising process. Foremost here are his concepts of figuration² and sociogenesis, explored in earlier chapters, which came to central place not only in his assessments of the sociological discipline but also in working out his alternative process sociological approach. Figuration and sociogenesis also seem to have been further developed against what Elias saw as problematic in the predominant sociological approaches of the time. In other words, he seems to have concluded that both concepts are central to how sociological studies should be carried out in his process sociological approach. In further developing them, Elias focused more detailed attention on explaining the characteristics of both, their interdependent relationship to one another, and their contributions to the de/civilising process.

Demonstrating that figuration is central to sociological inquiry (Elias 1970[2012]: 67-8, 123-8), Elias explained human interdependence using examples of games (Elias 1970[2012]: 66-98), formal dancing (Elias 1968[2012]: 526, 1987[2010]: 23), playing football (Elias and Dunning 1986[2008]: 35) and walking in cities (Elias 1987[2010]: 19). Understanding figuration as circumventing static views of society and social organisation, it is necessarily bound to the passing of time because it relies on a processual understanding of social development, rather than viewing social relationships in terms of a present-day snapshot (for a good summary of this, see Bax 1978: 223). With regard to sociogenesis, Elias in this second phase similarly argued that all sociological inquiry should account for long-term processes, and that accounting only for the present is insufficient (Elias

² The term 'figuration' was most likely not used until mid-1960s, but newer translations have added or interposed this term in the place of similar equivalents.

1970[2012], 1987[2010]). Envisioning the paths of developing figurations as irregular and largely unplanned, he nevertheless perceives long-term directionality as overall leading toward increased consolidation, integration and repression (Elias 1983[2007]: 29, 113n, 1984[2007]: 16-17, 1987[2010]: 111-2, 29-32; Elias and Dunning 1986[2008]: 149). Elias also understands figurations as interdependent entities which will, over time, come to have diminishing contrasts between and also increasing varieties within them (Elias 1939[2012]: 422-7), and that this process ‘is one of the most important particularities of the “process of civilising”’ (Elias 1939[2012]: 423).

These ostensibly opposing terms of ‘increasing varieties’ and ‘diminished contrasts’ are actually contingent on one another, and this is demonstrated through Elias’s explanation of how figurations develop. Featherstone also notes Elias’s intention to present the process by which diminished contrasts and increasing varieties manifest in terms of waves of tendencies (Featherstone 1987: 205). That figurations come to possess diminished contrasts and increasing varieties over the course of their development not only denotes a process in which external constraints come to be internalised, but also illustrates how outsiders come to be included in established figurations; and that these two factors contribute to understanding how the de/civilising process works over the course of long-term social development. Over time, figurations become denser and more complex with an increasing variety of different people involved. However, through continued interaction and by being subject to common external constraints such as prescribed manners and laws, members of a figuration become more like one another (Elias 1972[2009]: 92-6, 1939[2012]: 422-7). For example, Elias suggests that standards of living and conduct become more equalised when viewed over several centuries, but that this process also contributes to differentiation and rivalry between an increasing number of groups (Elias 1939[2012]: 464-78). The ‘lower strata’ mimic the ruling class and model their behaviours against the court habitus but, over time, come to internalise variations on the court’s habitual norms (Featherstone 1987: 205). This process in turn contests the court’s aristocratic position. Elias points out the established–outsider relationship at play in this example (Elias 1939[2012]: 422n2), but also emphasises the varieties which flourish within this gradual process of overall

refinement. In other words, when varieties proliferate, the shades of difference between them become increasingly negligible and so there are diminished contrasts.

Instantiating Elias's ideas about how some things change, but some stay the same, *The Loneliness of the Dying* (1979[2010]), *Quest for Excitement* (Elias and Dunning 1986[2008]), and *Mozart: The Sociology of a Genius* ([1991]2010), were all published during this second phase of his writing. In contrast with *An Essay on Time* (1984[2007]), which was originally published in the same period, these works are engaged with focused detail-specific examples rather than broad-stroke ideas and have their basis in the further-developed versions of figuration and sociogenesis. Elias here worked analytically in terms of developing interdependent relationships between the concepts and the specific subject-matters. His focus on particular subjects in these works seems to be because he discerned a number of factors bridging the small- and large-scale. These seemingly unconnected books also reflect Elias's ongoing efforts to further understand the developing relationship between external constraints and self-regulation, which he increasingly saw as central to understanding how the de/civilising process plays out (Goudsblom 1987a: 330). Crucial to his conclusions here are his observations about time as a broadly applicable self-regulatory influence in everyday life (Elias 1984[2007]: 39-44, 110-11), something which is directly related to his thinking about what it means to be a person in society at any given stage of social development.

Elias also studied being and person-ness in terms of the figuration. For example, in *The Loneliness of the Dying* (1979[2010]), what it is to be a 'self' is reconfigured in terms of large-scale processes of state-formation, and also by small-scale interdependent relationships between the self and others. When people are known to be dying, are sick or elderly, they are treated in different ways not just in terms of legislative and institutional procedures, but also and particularly in their social relations. Elias demonstrates that processes of ageing and dying change the qualities of social space, because they are always composed of the people interacting within it (Mennell 1985). Dying is also a topically relevant process for learning about the relationship between external constraints and self-regulation because it is a main instance of wherein 'blind forces break through the normal self-regulation of an organism' (Elias 1979[2010]: 64). In dying, fully socialised adults cannot control

what is happening to their own bodies, and also there are no laws which can halt this inevitable biological ending. Furthermore, the universal breakdown of self-regulatory practices within the dying process contributes to people's de-individualisation, with each dying person no longer able to interact with others in terms of previous self-regulatory frameworks.

Self-regulation is a central aspect of the theory of the de/civilising process, given its capacity to demonstrate the interdependence between individual and society, between individuals and other people, between social behaviours and personality structures, and the tenuous balances which are continually developing across these relationships. However, its interdependent relationship with external constraints is perhaps the glue which solidifies small-scale happenings with matters as grand as state-formation. The state becomes more apparent as a central theme in this second phase of Elias's work, and although foundational aspects of his thinking about state-formation are central to his earlier work, these ideas are honed in his (1989a[2013]) later analysis of Germany's de/civilising.

From *The Court Society* on, Elias conceives the de/civilising process in terms of the changing role of the state and the figural groupings involved, as well as the individuals and placeholders that are part of this, and how these develop over time. And this is what *The Court Society* is centrally about. It is focused on changing incarnations of the French monarchy and how these develop in relation to the state, and how the elite groups and 'lower-strata' groups were perceived in this process. In turn, the long-term development of the French state constructed the individual in particular kinds of ways at different stages of state formation. Elias understands the state as having an expanding role over time, but in undergoing this process it becomes disaggregated in a particular way rather than being inherent in a particular person (a monarch) and a small number of established groups. In essence the state proliferates, and this proliferation unfolds around managing power ratios and the monopoly of violence, accumulation and social regulation of various kinds.

When Elias began deliberating about his theory of the de/civilising process in *The Court Society*, he explained the state as a collection of figurations governed by a set of rules and characterised by a gradual consolidation of power which has a certain developmental directionality. He also recognised that the state becomes

involved in the accumulation of power, and that an increasing variety of states develop and will gradually come to have diminishing contrasts between them. However, Elias was very careful to distinguish between the absolutism of the state in the court society period with the absolutism of National Socialism and other totalitarian states in Appendix I to *The Court Society* (Elias 1969[2006]: 294-302). This is an important later addition to the published form of his Habilitation thesis and appeared accompanying its German publication (1969) and the following English translation (1983). Appendix I, titled 'On the Notion that there can be a State without Structural Conflicts' (1967[2006]), was written by Elias in response to an article in *Der Spiegel* magazine. In the Collected Works edition of *The Court Society*, editor Stephen Mennell added a subtitle to Appendix I, '[reflections on the National Socialist state]', to alert readers to important specifics of its contents (Mennell 2006: xv). Mennell explains he did this to highlight that 'Elias is offering some observations on power in the National Socialist state', and he continues that 'Nothing in Elias's own opaque title would make any but the most astute reader guess from the contents page that Elias was drawing parallels between life at court under the *ancient régime* and the competition between factions under Adolf Hitler' (Mennell 2006: xv).

Appendix I notes that careful study of the governmental apparatuses of absolutist monarchies contributes to understanding the strategies that the National Socialist rulers later employed (Elias 1967[2006]: 294-5). Elias also argues that National Socialism was able to take root in Germany because it offered a 'wishful picture' coinciding with the habitus of Germans who, having undergone a long tradition of top-down rule, came to experience and understand interpersonal interactions in terms of absolutes (Elias 1967[2006]: 299). As such, National Socialist rule was made possible because of the complementary German national/social habitus, which in turn had its origins in the (Prussian) absolutist traditions of previous court societies (Elias 1967[2006]: 298-9). But, while the absolutism of court societies was organised in terms of 'rule from above', National Socialism took power by harnessing the wish-dreams of people's private lives and 'transferring them to the level of the state' (Elias 1967[2006]: 299). This wishful picture was one of harking back to the seemingly conflict-free dictatorship of

absolutist monarchy. In the decades following the end of the Second World War (1960s-1970s), Elias points out how younger generations similarly pursued a wishful picture of society, but in this case the picture was constructed in contrast with the stigma of Nazism (Elias 1989a[2013]: 331-407). These wishful pictures wrongly presupposed that a consolidated dictatorship like National Socialism or Marxist applications of communism, when applied to a complex industrial state, could conduct society in a 'conflict-free' way comparable with how monarchic rule had done so in feudal society. Thus, Elias makes a distinction between kinds of absolutist rule, because the absolutism experienced as a result of a state's accumulation of power should be understood in the context of that society's particular de/civilising process, and in terms of the stage of development which that society is in the midst of. In this context, what it means for a state to have 'total control' differs at different stages in a society's development, and this underscores realities about the stage of de/civilising that a given society is experiencing.

Although it may not be an obviously central factor in his earlier works, the state is always present in what Elias writes, and it becomes increasingly important in his third-stage writings. With a thorough understanding of the de/civilising process at play in specific scenarios, as well as it being grounded in the contributing concepts of sociogenesis, figuration, habitus, state formation and power-relations, Elias's attention subsequently began to focus more on how these comprise larger-scale social trends. In this way, he began to enter the third phase of his work. During the late 1980s, Elias concentrated on using the theory of the de/civilising process to explain large-scale social problems. He asked what these processes mean in terms of the bigger picture of development and change on an international scale. Contra separating sociology into micro- and macro-, Elias's conception of the de/civilising process, and particularly its ideas about figural interdependence, demonstrates the interdependence of things as 'micro' as table manners and things as 'macro' as state-formation (Elias 1978[2009]: 129; van Daalen and Kuipers 2013: para 1; Dunning and Mennell 1998: 340). In this last phase, Elias tested the effectiveness of his theory of the de/civilising process, trying it out in relation to the origins and activities of National Socialism and post-war terrorism in East and West Germany. However, there was still something if not missing then downplayed, which acts to

both test and extend the existing conceptual framework. In this context, Elias undertook an in-depth study of de/civilising trends.

In particular, with regard to *Studies on the Germans* (1989a[2013]), this is the point where, more than anywhere else, Elias emphasises decivilising as an essential part of processual change. Throughout Elias's work, he explores examples of how monarchic and other governing forces encourage conformity and guide the process of de/civilising. Elias also discusses personality structures and changes in these as the product of structure, with people becoming increasingly self-regulatory over the course of time, and with violence becoming increasingly state-monopolised. Until this point Elias had noted almost in passing that, although societies appear to develop in a particular (non-unilinear) 'direction', developmental processes are imbued with balances of stasis and change, harmony and conflict (Elias 1939[2012]: 103, 479, 1989a[2013]: 125). It is tempting to use words like 'forward' and 'backward', 'reverse' (as in Mennell 1990a: 205) and 'advance', or 'retrogression' and 'progress' to which Elias took particular exception (Elias 1939[2012]: 287). Heinich (2013) understands this forward-backward reading of Elias to be a 'normative' and incorrect one promoting the view of understanding the de/civilising process in terms of 'more' or 'less'. However there are no perfect words and as Elias himself points out, the social sciences are not yet at a stage of development wherein any available 'linguistic instruments' can adequately delineate the nature and movement of intertwined processes (Elias 1939[2012]: 287). He thus argues phrasing can be misleading because it is always both and to varying degrees occurs simultaneously (Elias 1939[2012]: 287, 423). Confined by the limits of language, social scientists must approach discussions of de/civilising very carefully.

In *Studies on the Germans*, Elias emphasised the relative ease with which a society can shift from mostly civilising trends to largely decivilising trends in a short time. In what is understood as Elias's greatest work on habitus (Goudsblom and Mennell 1998: 235), the analytical focus on Germany, its populace and processes of social change, is also concerned with the sociogenesis of state-formation, interpersonal interdependence, prior civilising trends, and establisher–outsider relationships. *Studies on the Germans* is also Elias's first and only large study pertaining to a then-recent social scenario. Among other aspects, it explores the

question of how a prominent nation such as Germany became a locus of violence. Using Germany as an example to explore and to bring his ideas about de/civilising processes into clearer focus, Elias was foremost concerned with how people are situated in relation to social structures. In relation to this focus, two particular aspects should be noted. Elias was first interested in the circumstances where the de/civilising balance of national structures produced National Socialism and a fascist version of absolutism. Second, and regarding the post-war decades, Elias was interested in how the same set of structures also produced forms of terrorism in which another group of relatively young people, believing the Bonn Republic had descended back into fascism, fought against it violently and sought power by illegitimate ('terrorist') means (Elias 1989a[2013]: 425, 437).

Elias was long engaged with the fact that people, over the course of history, have devised many ways to live together without killing each other (Elias 1989a[2013]: 35-6). His ideas on this, including self-regulation and state consolidations of power and violence, came to the fore in this counterexample of Germany's decivilising. It should be emphasised that *Studies on the Germans* is not just about the Germans and Germany, nor specifically to do with fascism and National Socialism, as its subtitle makes clear. There are similar kinds of movements that happen elsewhere and in different ways, with further situations for using Elias's ideas about de/civilising occurring subsequently. Thus what should be taken away from reading *Studies on the Germans* is a set of broadly applicable ideas about the complexities of long-term development, how state structures shape people and habitus and the ramifications of structural change.

Although the book is centrally concerned with the example of Germany and the nation's processes of de/civilising in centuries leading up to the Second World War, the accompanying introduction and the added chapters and appendices of the Collected Works edition extend the analysis. The introduction brings *Studies on the Germans* into this broader focus through Elias's framing of matters in terms of the over-time formation of national habitus, and through his emphasising the main 'structural peculiarities' that had great influence over creating the climate necessary

for Hitler to take power.³ These processes are Europe-wide and date back to the Holy Roman Empire and, in detailing the long-term view of Germany's state formation, Elias also comes to further conclusions regarding the concept of habitus. Here he extends habitus to the national level, explaining that the development of habitus is closely tied with matters of social structures and accompanying state formational processes, and thus members of a nation share some common qualities. Elias also incorporates aspects of his theory of involvement and detachment so as to develop approaches for researching events that had personally affected him as the researcher (Elias 1989a[2013]: 3-4). Although Elias thought West Germany would not reunite with East Germany (Elias 1989a[2013]: 431), Germany did unify and terrorism did fade. Critics including Rojek (1986) and Bogner (1986) may term this a 'failure' of his theory in predictive terms, rather than an expression of dejectedness. Elias himself said he 'had nothing to do with prophecy' (Elias 1989b[2013]: 294), and I would likewise argue that people who claim Elias failed in predictive terms have misunderstood his aims because predicting the future is something he never set out to do. Instead the whole of his work is concerned with retrospective evaluation and explanation, with him rejecting the causal analyses often necessary for predictive conclusions as 'overly simplistic' (Elias 1970[2012]: 157-8). Elias himself said, 'I have nothing to do with prophecy. I only know that human beings have nothing but each other to help them overcome the difficulties of their lives' (Elias 1989b[2013]: 294).

In the Appendices to *Studies on the Germans*, Elias interestingly expands his analysis in relation to implications for the de/civilising process (Elias 1989a[2013]: 441-501). In this there are twenty short pieces pertaining to state formation, manners, habitus and social class, among other topics. In these works, which were written

³ *Studies on the Germans* is one of the books which was profoundly affected by its preparatory process for inclusion in The Collected Works of Norbert Elias. Here, editors Dunning and Mennell not only drew from the original English typescripts (to which they previously had no access), but also rearranged chapters into a 'more orthodox form' (Dunning and Mennell 2013: xiii) and made certain of Elias's footnotes into chapters and appendices to the volume. As such, the Collected Works editions differs greatly from the 1996 edition which kept to the original table of contents and translated from Schröter's former German translation (of some chapters which Elias wrote in English).

between 1961-1989, Elias is greatly concerned with structural matters pertaining to generations. He also gives further attention to the character of the state, and ways in which a state may be more easily conquered. Elias's various Appendices also focus on the national character and habitus of several countries including Britain and France, and provide some comparative analyses between them and Germany. One of the main conclusions derived from reading the Appendices and its examples of national character is that this is the product of structure.

Elias recognised that Germany continued to change, and was concerned with the effects that the decivilising spurt had on the nation's later development. Discussion of *Studies on the Germans* has merited attention in examining Elias's third phase of writing because it explains one of the final essential aspects of the de/civilising process at work: what happens when things seemingly shift 'backwards', for lack of a better term, and the 'how' of this. Although Elias wrote several other works around this time, including *The Symbol Theory* (1989[2011]) and many of the essays to be found in *Essays III: On Sociology and Humanities* (2009b), these contributed things which are less important in understanding the components and reach of the theory of the de/civilising process.

While this final phase of Elias's writing indicates his great interest in the roles of structure and power as well as processes of state-formation in connection with the de/civilising process, several of his interests from earlier phases persist. For example Elias's final book, *The Symbol Theory* (1989[2011]), evidences his continued interest in unravelling problems with established sociological thinking, as well as further developing the concepts at play in the theory of the de/civilising process.⁴ In particular, *The Symbol Theory* focuses on the role of language in society in terms of how people develop and relate to one another over time. For Elias, language and knowledge stress the interconnected and processual character of society, and inter-generational knowledge transmission underscores the irregularities of social development in the long-term (Elias 1989[2011]).

⁴ Although Goudsblom (1993) presents *The Symbol Theory* as being the last book Elias wrote, Dunning and Mennell (2013) point out that *Studies on the Germans* was the last book Elias published while still alive (Goudsblom 1993: 282; Dunning and Mennell 2013: xii). Hence 'final book' can have several meanings.

There are two opposing viewpoints pertaining to the relative importance of Elias's arguments here. Goudsblom (1993) unsurprisingly champions *The Symbol Theory*, calling it Elias's 'most ambitious book...[an] attempt at a grand synthesis' (Goudsblom 1993: 283). Goudsblom also suggests that some readers may encounter difficulties in orienting themselves while reading it, implying that those most familiar with Elias's work will better understand its structure and aims, and also its importance in the grand scheme of his writing. Ingold (1993) conversely argues that *The Symbol Theory*, rather than being a contribution, signals a lapse and a disregard for related biological theory and social sciences literatures (Ingold 1993: 372-3). Noting the repetitive nature of Elias's writing in it, Ingold summarises the arguments in *The Symbol Theory* in three paragraphs. These two opposing views suggest more about the politics surrounding Elias's legacy than the relative importance of the book's contents: while Goudsblom and other members of the Norbert Elias Foundation have striven to preserve and protect Elias's work and ideas, Ingold is an outsider and an unfair player in rather aggressively evaluating the book as a contribution to his own version of social science. From my position as someone familiar with Elias's work, but comparatively inexperienced, *The Symbol Theory* seems an exercise in further developing figurational and sociogenetic aspects of the de/civilising process, and it appears that Elias had not finished developing his arguments in it at the time of his death (Kilminster 2011).

Elias's early-career work on the theory of the de/civilising process saw this as composed of specific scenarios involving the relationship between developing social practices and internalised behaviours, with a focus on how this relationship illuminates broad overarching processes like state formation. It is quite difficult to pinpoint a clear beginning to this work because of the disjunctures between the order in which Elias wrote, the order in which these written works were initially published, and the order of publication of translations of these published and previously unpublished works. However, editorial comments suggest that Elias's aim in writing the thesis that would later be published as *The Court Society* was to understand how the relationship between prescribed mores and internalised behaviours contributes to long-term social development within a specific society (Mennell 2006: xi-xv). But as the discussion here has shown, by the end of the third phase of Elias's work, when he

had more-or-less completed his fifteenth book and a large number of essays, his theory of the de/civilising process had developed into a much more widely encompassing and complex approach to exploring social development.

This rests upon the understanding that each society undergoes processual stages of development, that these developmental stages take place in terms of processes of state-formation and accumulation, that within these processes societies are composed of interdependent people involved in constructing and also being constrained by them, and that small-scale local scenarios are intrinsic to a society's large-scale developments in the *longue durée*. The components of Elias's earlier theory of the de/civilising process include figurations, their established–outsider relationships, un/planned outcomes and over-time diminished contrasts and increasing varieties, the rise of individualisation and related trends in the developing We-I balance, processes of state-formation and the state's over-time consolidation and accumulation of power and violence, and developing relationships between external constraints and internalised behaviours. Elias's later greater focus on decivilising shifts and retreats into barbarism added aspects pertaining to ratios of power, the role of generational differences, the tenuousness of de/civilising processes and the potential for them to quickly change, as well as the role of social structures in developing habitus and personality structures. All of his works fit together, and one of the things that grounds them is his ideas about established–outsider relationships. Power translates into the court of Louis XIV as well as housing estates, but the ways in which power manifests in de/civilising inform the theory itself as well the particular subjects and the stage of social development they are part of (Árnason 1989). Practices of exclusion and perceived supremacy also have roots in Hitler's rise to power (Dunning and Mennell 1998: 352) as well as the discord between gentleman and seamen in the early-stage British navy. Concepts composing and supporting the theory of the de/civilising process act as threads running through the entirety of Elias's work, and thus conceiving his work in terms of a harmonious yet developing set of ideas used analytically regarding a variety of circumstances aids readers in grasping at how he sees the bigger picture playing out.

Having explored Elias's developing ideas about the de/civilising process over time and his ideas about how and in what ways to theorise the bigger picture of

social change, I shall shortly turn my attention to British independent funeral directors. In particular, I am concerned with how they see a bigger picture of change occurring in their lives and work, and how they comment on this. My approach in what follows does not involve applying Elias's ideas, and the task is not to discover bits of Elias's ideas in what funeral directors say. Instead, the task is to do what Elias suggests: to recognise that things are different in different contexts, as in *The Court Society*, where he argues that the situation in France is different from that in England (Elias 1969[2006]: 75) or Germany (Elias 1969[2006]: 122-3).

This is because Elias recognises that processes of state formation are unique to each society in which they occur. Particularly, de/civilising processes rely upon the sociogenesis of specific elements such as the state. And within this there are particular – and different – processes of state-formation and of the state's gradual accumulation of power, and the formation and development of structures within that state (Árnason 1989; van den Bergh 2016). An example of this is the notion of a 'good society', which differed between the courts of France, England and Germany (Elias 1969[2006]: 104-8). The French 'good society' referred to a unified locale surrounding the King, whilst England's version of 'good society' was less concentrated around the monarchy and more centred around social codes of conduct and manners, 'society with a capital S' (Elias 1969[2006]: 105). And unlike these, German 'good society' took shape comparatively recently, and was instead made up of regional 'good societies' grouped around either local lords or courts (Elias 1969[2006]: 106-7). That being said, most of *Studies on the Germans* is concerned with Germany post-Bismarck, and thus Elias's emphasis on duelling, the rise of National Socialism and post-war Germany. His focus then shifts, to examine ways in which the state turned into one ruled by Hitler, then to a state divided and fighting in different ways against the memory of Hitler (Bjola and Kornprobst 2007: 298). At every point of this analysis, he brings to light the importance of specific and unique relationships between people and social structures – that this relationship re/produces notions of a 'good society' at each stage in a nation's de/civilising process.

Elias points out that, although not constituting an absolute beginning, the past, when viewed in terms of processes of power consolidation, enforcement of manners and state formation, has continuing ramifications for the future of the societies in

question. Although Elias writes about this in terms of specifics in *The Court Society*, *Studies on the Germans*, *On the Process of Civilising* and elsewhere, he also writes about it in more general terms in making the point that the past continues to have reverberations in shaping the present. De/civilising processes also involve society-specific questions about how social structures constrain people's actions and influence people's internalised behaviours, and how all of these factors play out over the *longue durée*. Taking Elias's arguments into account, I shall now explore how the British independent funeral directors I interviewed explain the bigger picture in their own terms. They have a set of understandings about what the processes and direction of change are and what established–outsider relationships develop within that; and there is a bigger picture according to them. Some of these understandings are shared, and there are also some differences between them including within the same family.

II. The Bigger Picture According to Independent Funeral Directors

i. introduction

The independent funeral directors I interviewed have an understanding of a bigger picture pertaining to how the things they told me about fit together regarding the past, present and future, and how things change over time. There are aspects of this which are shared across the whole group regardless of what part of Britain the firm is in, and whether they are older or younger members of a firm; and there are also aspects where differences exist (Howarth 1992: 106). As a group they perceive changes having occurred over time that are in a sense patterned, and they also see this as having a sociogenetic quality. The changes that the independent directors see happening include the tradition that they identify with, as well as the situation they are presently in, and their understandings of where this process is going.

Discussion here explores the bigger picture arising from the details of the interviews. There are many interesting questions about this, and I am aware that there are funeral directors working in a variety of circumstances and that there is a relevant literature on all of this. However, the task here is to focus on the main overarching themes in what the independent funeral directors expressed. Also, I am aware that in a sense I am revisiting some topics discussed in earlier chapters, but

here the material takes on a different resonance because this is the bigger picture for them, of how they see the overall patterns of change. As I will discuss, these changes are not larger, societal-level ones, but are specific and concerned with the local, the situational and the contextual, and how these interconnect.

ii. the calling and the training

Previous chapters have discussed aspects of how the independent funeral directors perceive their legitimacy and their place within the funeral industry. Their perceptions are grounded in the idea of them having a calling, and this involves an understanding of funeral directing as the main focus of their lives (Parsons 2014, 1997: 266; Schäfer 2007: 9). The funeral directors I interviewed represented themselves as having a calling to the work, and possessing a civility that is socialised into them from a young age. And as the majority of funeral directors I interviewed are members of long-standing funeral directing families, their calling to the work was often presented in association with having a birthright. Being representatives of a lengthy tradition, the independent directors situate themselves as products of a long process of development, and likewise illustrate their places in the industry in these terms:

Lily: Well you do find that, in undertaking, it's all about the generations.

Alan: You find that a lot with undertakers – [Scottish city] ones a lot of them go back generations.

Tobias: A lot of them have been bought over.

Alan: Yeah, a lot of them have been bought over; that's the problem, and the people in them now are not even descendants

(Transcript of Interview with L, A & T Stevenson 22.7.2014: 1596-1604).

To the Stevensons, that firms are increasingly hiring non-family members signals a deterioration of the traditional convention of entirely family-run firms which are passed down from one generation to the next. Their insistence on the continued reality of multi-generational family funeral firms, while also expressing disappointment that conglomerates have purchased many previously family-owned firms and employ 'not even descendants', is a contradiction which highlights their

ingrained belief that the traditional model of family-run firms is optimal. It is also contradictory because even R L Stevenson & Son, which has the most family-member employees of any mid-sized firm where I interviewed, still employs non-family workers as well.

Alan's suggestion that the people working in 'bought over' firms are 'not even descendants' also highlights 'the problem' that those without lineage do not have a calling and so are not as good at funeral directing. Lily and Alan's explanation implies that, when bought by a conglomerate firm, independent funeral firms cease being 'about the generations' and thereby stop living up to tradition and convention. However, as noted in Chapter Three, the process of buying a firm may specifically require certain periods during which one or more family members must continue employment for a set time. In the cases to which Lily and Alan were referring, there were two other independent firms in the area that were in competition with R L Stevenson & Son, and those employed just a few family members. Consequently Lily and Alan are able to make this generalisation of independent firms being about family, and conglomerate firms not being about family. Given the familial makeup of their particular firm, discussed later, the Stevensons can gloss over the fact that many contemporary independent firms employ only one or two family members, and indeed that conglomerate firms may be family-run. It all seems to reduce to 'independent firms = good' and 'conglomerate firms = bad', also discussed later.

The underlying assumptions here are twofold. First Lily and Alan's comments assume that all members of an undertaking family have a calling to the work, and thus will grow into experts who work in the firm all their lives. Second, they assume that all 'proper' independent funeral directors have a family lineage. Of my interviewees, Arthur, Tobias and Jamie are the only funeral directors who do not have direct family links in the trade, with the rest having generational ties. However, of those born into funeral directing families, only a few felt drawn to the work from an early age, or have spent their entire working careers as funeral directors, something presented as secondary to birthright in their explanations. Although Lily and Alan focus on the generational aspects in terms of what 'you find', there are an increasing number of non-family funeral directors working in independent and conglomerate firms. Furthermore, the feeling of having a calling, as evidenced by

non-family interviewees, is not always associated with biological relationships, with those not having a family connection claiming they were drawn to the work because of something special within them as individuals.

Traditional independent directors are socialised into a system of manners and rules, which are apparently passed down intact, but are actually adapted and changed over the generations. This system of manners and rules, as well as the traditional framework they derive from, licenses independent funeral directors to see themselves as the most capable of understanding the ‘right’ ways of doing funerals. They thus feel they have the duty of protecting these traditional practices, and they do so by acting to ensure the continuation of their own firms and thereby ensuring the continued improvement of the funeral industry. Membership within this established group of independent funeral firms relies on practices of exclusion as well as adhering to in-group rules and understandings. However, becoming a member of an established independent firm is not so simple as internalising and acting in accordance with the existing habitus. The Stevensons explain the ‘normal’ order of things:

Lily: Well, that’s just normal then isn’t it?
That’s the only way you really learn the trade is to – is working in it, like Alan and them [her other sons], they learned the trade coming into the business with us. And same with my father, he would learn the trade going in with his uncle... and we get people applying to us to train as an undertaker – very difficult!

Alan: Very difficult.

Lily: Especially, we family businesses, we don’t let them in!

Alan: Well of course – I mean, you’ll employ family before anybody else. It’s not always everybody in a family that fancies being an undertaker.

Lily: Yeah, yeah well that’s true enough, yeah...

Tobias: [to Alan] Well, you didn’t get much choice!

Alan: No, I didn’t get much choice.

Tobias: Your dad [meaning himself] – that’s all he ever wanted to be.

Alan: “You’re coming to work with us”, that’s what I got told.

Tobias: *sceptical noise*

Lily: That's all he
 ever wanted to do, Alan... Yeah, yeah
 (Transcript of Interview with L, A & T
 Stevenson 22.7.2014: 238-56).

The contradiction is interesting. While Lily and Alan were born into the occupational tradition, Tobias in fact married in. Although Lily argues that proper independent funeral firms are comprised entirely of family members, Alan points out that this is not always possible. While this firm will employ family before anyone else, it is not always the case that all family members want to take part. And despite how Tobias explains his own past in undertaking as 'all he ever wanted to do', Alan says he did not have a choice in whether he worked at the firm but was told to. There seems to be a gradual dilution of practices extending from Lily and Tobias's generation to that of their children: the insistent 'always' being diluted by the tempered 'sometimes'. Of the firms where I interviewed, R L Stevenson & Son is in fact one of the few where the majority of employees are family members: two parents, three out of four children and their spouses. From their increasingly rare vantage-point, the Stevensons highlight the persisting understanding among independent funeral firms that the best, and for some the only, way of learning the trade 'properly' is by growing up in it, and this usually involves being a child or close relation of one of a firm's existing directors. Lily's presentation of this as 'normal' seems to undercut the gradual dilution of traditional practices in assuming that that status quo will continue without change. Despite contradictory evidence, she maintains that proper independent firms will continue to be run by family and that new members will continue learning the trade from their parents, as was the case for her.

There have been, of course, many outliers who were not part of an undertaking lineage. One is Arthur, who began work at the prominent firm of H G Wells & Son as a young boy:

Arthur: I never had a father to teach me what's what, but I was in it [funeral directing] since I was a boy. That's how I met Julian too. We did a lot of work together. He'd come over to H G Wells & Son or I'd help [at Conan Doyle & Sons] (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Huxley 4.9.2014: 25-8).

Although Arthur was not born into an undertaking family, his comment recognises the perceived importance of lineage, given his concession that he ‘never had a father to teach [him]’. However, against this, many of my interviewees who were born into a family of funeral directors in fact initially chose alternative professions before working at the firm. Arthur’s employment by the then-esteemed firm of H G Wells & Son and later career as a well-known funeral director suggests that adopting the outlook of an independent funeral firm as well as comporting oneself according to a mandated set of manners are the actual central factors, rather than family membership as such. At the same time, many of the independent directors learned the traditions of the trade from their parents, took up the calling to preserve those traditions, and expected to pass this down to their own children. Understanding the importance of long-term socialisation from a young age, and perhaps because they resist or are unable to perceive the merits of an alternative process of learning, they describe this as the best way of becoming a good funeral director and preserving the traditional practices of ‘proper’ British funeral directing.

Tobias commented that funeral directing was ‘all he ever wanted to do’, and this was echoed by other interviewees and points to a notion of vocational calling. Arthur expressed something similar:

Arthur: You got to love this job. It becomes part of you. It’s in your blood... It just becomes part of you and then it’s all you do (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Huxley 4.9.2014: 30-31, 44-5).

His suggestion that the calling to funeral directing is in one’s blood refers to something deeper and more substantial than family membership. Also, the idea of a trans-generational vocational calling seems an after-the-fact rationalisation, for as noted earlier many of the funeral directors I met were originally in other professions. Although the majority were born into undertaking families, Carl worked in PR, Alistair was a solicitor, Jamie sold car parts, Alex studied sports medicine and Clancy studied maths. Sloan wanted to be a journalist, and Julian wanted to be an accountant. It is unclear what Nolan did but he holds an MBA, while Horace was apprenticed as a joiner and still moonlights as a contractor. Of my interviewees, it is therefore just Ted, the Stevenson family (excepting George, who attended university

first, and Tobias who married in) and Arthur who have worked in the funeral business all their lives. Often the funeral directors came to work at their family firms either by chance or as something explained after-the-fact as somehow inevitable, with their prior jobs sometimes presented in terms of a gap period necessary for orienting themselves to the subsequent and more important work of funeral directing.

Emilia: Did you always want to be a funeral director?

Julian: No, not at all really. I wanted to be either an accountant or a veterinarian. I finished school and was doing the accounting credits in college. My brother always wanted to get into the [funeral] business. He used to skip school to wash horses and help out. Eventually, I decided this was for me (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 266-72).

In noting that his brother, who is now a co-owner of Conan Doyle & Sons, had ‘always wanted’ to become a funeral director, Julian’s comment illuminates the possibilities for variation within undertaking families. Although Julian did eventually decide to join the firm, some family members never do. For instance, Clancy’s brother works for a water supply company, Sloan’s daughter works with special needs children, and Lily and Tobias have an adult daughter who is not working at the firm. However, these variations are glossed over in presenting independent funeral firms as all-family. The insistence on the multi-generational vocation points up the funeral directors’ interest in being perceived as representatives of a stage in an unbroken process. Perhaps most importantly, this notion of the calling also licenses the independent funeral directors to understand the bigger picture and legitimates them in making claims about this.

When asked about a bigger picture regarding what has changed in the industry, the directors explained this in terms of many small-scale aspects, referring to ‘this person’, ‘that removal’, ‘that coffin’, ‘this area’ and so on. However, the small-scale aspects make up the whole, and despite the short-term character of many of their observations of change, they are in fact people having long-standing employment within an industry that they very much identify with. They have ideas about a bigger picture in which the short-term is embedded; and they think in depth about how things are, how things have changed over the last few decades, and what the possible

‘direction’ of change in the future is likely to be. The main elements of the bigger picture as expressed to me are marked by a romanticised view of the past and a devotion to tradition, characterised by independent funeral directors being involved in good social work services, lacking an interest in money and being deeply embedded in local communities. The idea and reality of the calling are crucial in this. Also changes are seen to happen, largely to do with the emergence of the conglomerate firms. Relatedly, the history of the British funeral industry as told to me by the independent directors is one of the good past and the bad present, and it valorises the independent firms and their struggle for survival brought about by the intrusion of these unwelcome outsiders. This romanticised view of the past and demonic view of the present and the future also has notable silences. In what follows, the key interconnected aspects of the bigger picture will be brought to the fore and discussed.

iii. personalisation, secularisation and disenchantment: an ontological shift?

According to the funeral directors I interviewed, there has been a shift in terms of ideas about what it is to be a person, and relatedly in thinking about dying and death, occurring from approximately the early Victorian period to the present. This shift has involved processes of disenchantment especially pertaining to the meaning of death and life, but also including processes of secularisation wherein religious frameworks, formulations and beliefs have become much less present both in everyday life and in how people think about death (Wouters 2002; Walter 1996). In terms of the British funeral industry, this shift is an ontological one that has manifested over time and in which funerals are becoming increasingly secular and personalised. Funerals are becoming more like social events focusing on the memories and particularities of the now-deceased person’s life, rather than their death as one in a succession experienced by a community or congregation.

Julian: It used to be that people wanted to outdo their neighbours. “So-and-so had 8 funeral cars, so we’ll have 10...” even if there was nobody in some of the cars. A few times, we had empty cars, or some with two or three people in them. It’s just the show of things that they wanted

(Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 65-9).

In pointing out how funerals in the past were arranged with the aim of outdoing neighbours via conspicuous consumption (Veblen 1934), Julian highlights here the changing roles of social expectations, the quest for status and community pressures in the funeral process. From Julian's explanation of what 'used to be', it seems as though earlier funerals had been arranged according to a standard set of community mores, and that these were in a sense empty. However, as people have increasingly come to understand themselves as 'individuals', it follows for him that funerals will reflect this development.

Julian: I had this Jamaican family... [one of the clients was a] big jolly guy – huge neck. Anyway, they come in and explain that they received £30,000 from their dad in the Will, and they want to use all of it on the funeral. They explained that he was always “over the top” – liked a bit of “bling” in everything he did – and they wanted to give him a fitting send off. So we had the casket that Michael Jackson was buried in – that gold one. We had it especially imported – [it cost] around £20,000 quid for that thing. And they pulled out all the stops for him. Great funeral, and exactly what they wanted (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 105-14).

Julian's comments suggest a change in what it means for a funeral to be 'fitting'. Whereas traditionally 'a fitting send-off' may have pertained to what Julian suggests are empty expressions of status – pure status in fact – the contemporary version of 'a fitting send-off' involves funerals which are in line with the deceased's personality. A 'great funeral' costs in the range of £30,000, is befitting of the person who has died and does not really pertain to resolving the mourners' emotional turmoil. From Julian's description of the funeral, it seems as if he understands personalised and highly expensive funerals as having a meaning that traditional funerals lacked. Shifting away from community-based rubrics, funerals are increasingly becoming more to do with celebrating the lives of dead individuals and 'pull[ing] out all the stops', and are by degrees different from so-called traditional approaches.

Julian's comments also imply that 'better' funerals are more expensive, bigger or fancier, in effect equating 'better' and 'great' with money spent. In focusing on the money spent and related elements, Julian did not acknowledge that the purpose of a funeral is to mark a decisive and socially-acknowledged ending to a life. Furthermore, Julian did not seem to consider helping mourners accept the reality of death via the arrangement process and funeral to be part of his job (Hockey 1996: 57). However, if funeral-goers do not find closure, and are not certain in their understanding that the deceased is really dead, then in a sense the funeral has not been successful. Recent personalised 'successful' funerals, however, were described to me as if parties where everybody seemed to be enjoying themselves despite the circumstances. Recalling Alistair's account of the funeral for the mother of some 'known criminals', he described it as a success because, 'They said it was the best party they'd been to in a while' (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Stoker 4.6.2014: 297-8). Traditional, simple (and often religious) funerals of the past were perhaps more effective in providing closure, because closure was what funeral-goers were expecting to achieve, and because those involved were socialised into belief and behaviour traditions which gave the funeral proceedings a force in guiding their ontological views and thus in acknowledging the 'endings' of recently-dead people.

While community and religious frameworks may have previously shaped the character and purpose of funerals as well as the nature of requisite goods and services for purchase, this is increasingly less so in contemporary Britain. Instead, those involved in the funeral arrangements pick and choose available cultural forms to express meanings particular to them (Hockey 1996: 59). However, their focus tends to stray away from the dead person and also away from accepting the death, and toward celebrating a life which in a sense still continues. In comparing conspicuously expensive choices, ten funeral cars say something different from a decorated fire engine, and a solid walnut coffin says something different from a coffin shaped like an aeroplane (Kelly 2015). What the latter examples indicate is that a unique person used to be alive, and that the funeral is about this person as an individual. Funerals are thus in effect becoming life-focused rather than death-and-closure-focused endeavours, which indicate changes in social views of personhood, including the elision of death as final, a disenchantment with death's meaning

(Weber 2004) and a disillusionment with traditional religious approaches to the supposed afterlife. With a mounting range of choices available, the possibilities broaden drastically, and the traditional function of funerals as a means for saying the final ‘goodbye’ is becoming for some an opportunity for denial.

Nolan: [*Gestures to extensive display of ash-scattering tubes*] You wouldn’t have people wanting these [in previous generations]. Not in so many colours, or at all. They would just scatter the ashes from the urn or whatever they got from the crematorium. Now, people want special things (Fieldnotes of Interview with N Hardy 18.7.2014: 103-6).

Nolan’s generalisation here about people’s (assumedly living customers and the local community) consumption interests suggests a broadening interest in funerary goods, and perhaps a shift from ‘what is expected’ to ‘what is wanted’ (Holloway et al. 2013). His comment also points up an underlying understanding of funeral consumers as living people, and not the deceased.

Regarding this increasingly prevalent life-focus of contemporary funerary arrangement processes and expectations, Weber might argue that this is happening in accordance with Britain having undergone a gradual process of disenchantment with ideas about death as having meaning, and that increasingly death has ‘no meaning for a civilized person’ (Weber 2004: 13). To the extent that people situate their lives in terms of progress and a social understanding of over-time development as infinite, there can thereby be no ‘intrinsically meaningful end’ to a person (Weber 2004: 13). Disenchantment with death’s meaning has among other things involved over-time processes of secularisation, which have in turn contested and reorganised ideas about an afterlife. And where funerals are concerned, these processes have been manifested in funerals which can avoid complicated feelings of grief and loss and celebrate instead (Holloway et al. 2013). Death brings with it unanswerable questions, and rather than address them, survivors have a more nihilistic approach: death is meaningless, so better to imbue the funeral with life-based meaning. However, despite this, the funeral directors generally explained changes in terms of buying patterns and consumer interests rather than the rationale behind life-focused funerals. In a way similar to Julian, Nolan suggests that customers used to adhere

more to traditional local-community standards when arranging funerals, but now they are embracing the variety of goods available and arranging increasingly specialised funerals.

Nolan: ...Another thing that has changed is the sheer choice of things available. It used to be that everyone had the same plain wood coffin and the same religious service. Now, there are so many options! It used to be that arranging a funeral was as simple as ticking a few boxes on a sheet, but now there's much more variety.

Emilia: Sort of a diversification of grief?

Nolan: Yes, that sounds right. We had one man die of cancer, and before he died, his wife and he had gone everywhere – did a bucket list; and they took pictures of everything. So the family sent all the photos to a coffin manufacturer we use, and they stuck all the photos onto the casket – they sort of painted them on. So that was a really unique coffin. And we get all sorts: golf, ballet, football colours – We even had a funeral where all the mourners were asked to dress up like superheroes and characters from [popular film]. It made the news. Twenty years ago, people would have shaken their heads and “tsked”, but not now.... it seems like people are getting more and more interested in this personal quality to funerals (Fieldnotes of Interview with N Hardy 18.7.2014: 81-100).

Nolan's explanation suggests that Joyce & Hardy provides choices because customers now generally want them, and that this development is part of a decades long process of shifting from sombre occasions for mourning to elaborate celebrations of life (Holloway et al. 2013). However, this is also a supply-driven change, and not just a demand-driven one like Nolan suggests, with customers 'shopping' within the confines of what is available at any given point. Nolan's view that 'people' would once have deemed personalised funerary products as inappropriate but now show an interest in them indicates what he perceives as a shift in social feeling made visible via the increased sales of such products. As coffin and urn manufacturers and other funerary supply companies progressively diversify their product lines (Schäfer and McManus 2016; Walter 2005), and as customers continue to purchase more individualised funerals, so funeral firms carry on broadening the

services and goods offered while also facilitating an expanding number of special requests.

Sloan: We do all sorts of special requests – can get all sorts of special vehicles. We’ve done a lot [of funerals] with cars, buses, motorbikes and everything. We did [a funeral with] a VW bus last week – the ones from the 60s (Fieldnotes of Interview with S Shakespeare 4.6.2014: 178-82).

Sloan’s comment points out that firms can hire alternative vehicles in order to comply with special requests from customers. His comment is also indicative of the general way in which the independent directors explain the emerging trend toward ‘special’ or personalised funerals. Although they are generally more complicated to organise, the directors explained their enthusiasm in terms of rising to new challenges and taking interest in what mourners want.

Julian: We get a lot of special requests lately. We had one last week that specifically requested no one wear black to his funeral. I got all the staff navy suits. Another one wanted pink ties, so we did that. We do whatever people want (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 116-20).

In contrast to adhering to local funerary traditions in an effort to find closure, and striving to outdo neighbours within a limited framework of available options, present-day personalised funerals seem to represent a shift in thinking about community dynamics or loss of community, as well as in thinking about personhood and what it means to die and to carry on living for mourners. So-called ‘traditional’ funerals, as noted earlier, seem to have been more concerned with community expectations and the loss of a community member, with each funeral being arranged in terms of those previous to it. However, personalised funerals seem to be arranged in terms of the deceased as a separate and unique entity: ‘She admired the 1960s mentality, so we’ll drive her to the cemetery in a VW bus’, and so on. Likewise, instead of ‘letting go’, personalised aspects of funerals can suggest attempts to cling to a time when the deceased was still alive. Personalised funerals relatedly seem to focus on creating ‘nice’ occasions for memories, rather than being mournful occasions for communal grief and closure.

Julian: We had a funeral for a man who was in the fire brigade for 26 years. We rented a fire engine to carry the coffin, and we put on the siren when we were driving to the cemetery. The daughter and the mother were in front of us, and I could see them laughing – they thought it was so great. They wrote one of the thank you cards (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 325-30).

Julian's recollection of the mother and daughter laughing might appear shocking at a funeral. However, it may often be the case that people remember happy or funny memories of a close relation at the funeral like this. Although within the realm of 'allowed' behaviours (Wouters 2002), it is still an instance of the non-traditional and 'authentic' aspects that personalised funerals have come to stand for. While funerals are traditionally seen as sad and sombre occasions (Strange 2005: 128; Jalland 1996, 1999), displays of happy behaviour may signal further evidence of individualism in respect of funerals. Ways of behaving traditionally considered 'unsuitable' for mourners are now permissible because funerals are increasingly about personal feelings of remembrance and decreasingly about social expectations of mourning (Walter 1996b: 198).

In the example of the mother and daughter laughing, Julian also conveys his understanding of developing social trends and that Conan Doyle & Sons is able to create a climate in which mourners feel comfortable in expressing personal forms of grief including ones that feature the celebratory aspects increasingly prevalent in contemporary funerals, rather than just sorrow and loss.

Julian: We try to make it an occasion that you can remember and that you don't want to leave. I didn't want to leave my mum's funeral because it was so nice and everything was perfect (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 345-8).

It is interesting how Julian shifts from making generalisations about 'you', to a specific funeral commented on in very personal terms. Perhaps Julian was underscoring that his firm takes the same care in arranging all funerals as they did with his mother's. Perhaps also he was acknowledging his inability to accept the finality of his mother's death by associating it with his understanding of customers'

expectations. Not wanting to leave can signal difficulty in ‘letting go’ and avoiding acknowledging an unwelcome ending. Conversely, Julian’s emphasis on the funeral being ‘perfect’ suggests celebratory events rather than sad occasions for saying goodbye, and may hint at a changing role for funerals in Britain. And likewise, funerals are becoming more specific to the people who have died and their wishes, in particular through their mourners’ interpretations of this.

This focus on the individual contends with traditional religious frameworks, and a shift toward the secular and personalised is especially discernible when considering who becomes involved in the contemporary funeral arrangement processes:

Nolan: The other thing [that has changed] is the lack of a religious element. There never used to be humanists or celebrants involved, but now more people opt for that (Fieldnotes of Interview with N Hardy 18.7.2014: 125-8).

Recalling Nolan’s earlier comment about customers making use of the increasing range of products and services, here too he positions the role of non-religious officiants in terms of options and choices. Elsewhere the suggestion from him was that people may not have wanted a priest involved but previously did not have such alternatives available. But customers did have options had they chosen to arrange the funeral with a co-operative funeral firm, for these have provided secular alternatives since their beginnings in the 1920s (Jupp and Walter 1999: 263; Parsons 2014). Although Nolan presented non-religious versus religious options in terms of either/or, preparing the funeral service may prove more complicated. Ted points up the increasing interest in secular funerals, and sees his role as ensuring that customers can have their chosen mix of traditional, religious and secular elements:

Ted: One thing that I think is really... sociological... that would interest you is that about 20 years ago, the vicar would call us to say there’s a body; but, now, more often we call them – if at all. Back then, people had what I like to call “afterlife insurance”: they may not be sure about God, but would have a religious service just to be sure. This was before the humanists came in. We had a lot of interest in the humanists and then they went overboard – I tell clients that they can’t have any hymns or

mentions of God and all, and they don't usually want that. "No hymns?", they'll say, "We'd like to have at least one hymn". That's where what we call "secular celebrants" come in – they're the middle ground between the vicars and the humanists. Celebrants will do whatever you want. So I sit down with the family and take down a lot of notes and we put together something really specific to the person. Then we email it to the family and they can fix whatever they want fixed (Fieldnotes of Interview with T Orwell 30.6.2014: 246-61).

Ted's comments move from what he described as a 'sociological' phenomenon into first a description of a timeline for change, and then an example of his firm accommodating customers' preferences. For Ted, the aim is to please and so, like the optimal secular celebrant or the accomplished event planner (Dickenson 2012; Hyland and Morse 1995), the staff at G Orwell Funeral Services will do whatever the customer wants. While aspects of individualism, religion, relationships, understandings of not/being and consumerism are certainly at play in the things I was told about arranging funerals, there is also an emphasis on a conception of the funeral director as not interested in profits, but instead in fostering all-accommodating processes of co-production that result in bespoke funerals.

To address the question in the title of this section, in terms of what funeral directors told me, there does seem to have been an ontological shift which has manifested in customers' funerary preferences for the personalised and celebratory. The funeral directors explained these preferences as a reaction to the wider choices now available. However, the shift has been one signalling a breakdown of imposed expectations about how to mark the end of life. In line with Elias's (1979[2010]) work on death and dying, van Gennep's (1961/1909) concept of liminality conceives death in processual terms. Rather than life and death being at odds in terms of either/or relationships like public/private and living/dead, van Gennep believes death, as a process, comprises three ontological stages which become noticeable through the ritual behaviours and practices of the living people who manage the process (van Gennep 1961/1909; Turner 1969; Hockey 2002). Harper's (2010b) study has argued that, within the liminal period, mourners can view the deceased as retaining a form of pre-death agency. This is a great example of the difficulties

contemporary mourners may encounter in reconciling that someone was very recently alive, but is now gone. Hertz (1960) notes that the reality of death takes a long time to sink in, and the process by which the living come to acknowledge a death involves undergoing many small shifts and changes before arriving at the understanding that ‘they’re really dead’, and some examples of these shifts can be put into motion through mourners’ actions of memorialising the person (Howarth 2000) or the performance of meaningful rituals (Hallam and Hockey 2001). This is a two-sided coin where mourners can either use these experiences and actions to come to terms with a death or to ignore it, thereby extending the period of liminality wherein they can continue to avoid acknowledging the death. Howarth argues that nowadays, the period of liminality (which historically marked the time between the death and the end of the funeral service) ‘has been extended, perhaps stretched back to the point where it takes on a new meaning’ and that ‘...this extended period of liminality could serve to illustrate the increasing inadequacy of the concept of boundaries’ (Howarth 2000: 129). And considering that boundaries are shifting and the liminal period may now extend beyond the end of the funeral, this raises the question of liminality in the funerary context which is being capitalised on in the contemporary funeral arrangement process.

iv. sequestration? space, place and non-place

In consequence of their ideas about the changing ontology of being and dying, the independent funeral directors I interviewed understand space and place as also having been reorganised over time. According to them, space and place have been rearranged in terms of their associations with life, with death as a part of life and with the sacred. As changes in the organisation of space and place develop, there is the presumption that the independent firm is separate from – and outside of – the passing of time, as well as separate from decay by treating the funeral parlour (at least its frontstage) as also separate from this.

In their work practices, funeral directors uphold a differentiation between different kinds of space and appropriate behaviours for specific situations. They shield their customers from trade secrets to do with preparing dead bodies, and focus on life-centric elements of funeral arrangements. Their work also includes ethical

considerations and what is considered ‘proper’ duty or responsibility to those who have died. In protecting customers, cultivating honour in their working practices and preserving their secrets, they are guardians of their trade as well as protectors of the living and dead people who become involved in arranging the funeral. These processes are not only seen as ‘taming’ the wild or unruly aspects of death (Douglas 1966; Ariès 1981), but also ensuring the long-term persistence of their firms. As such, the independent directors see themselves both as products and also guardians of the funeral industry’s developmental process.

There has been a gradual distancing of the dead from the living, and this involves shifts in ontological understandings as well as the managerial choices of funeral directors. And acts of pushing the dead away signal changes in the ways living people understand death, and act to ‘other’ it.

Lily: The first thing is if, if somebody’s nursed somebody, maybe for a year or something in the house and they’ve died the first thing [*snaps fingers*] they want is an undertaker to come and take the body away! That’s the way it is now. The first thing they want is them gone after nursing them all year.

Alan: And that’s changed, that’s changed. It didn’t used to be that. I mean we’d get called on a Sunday morning at 9 o’clock:

“Oh, Mum died last night, and we want a funeral but I didn’t want to disturb you”. They did that a lot, whereas now they just phone you at 1 minute past 12 and say, “Mum’s dead; can you come and get her?” So. It’s changed.

People’s views have changed and the way they look at funeral directing and things of the like.

As I say, I mean, they’re not used to having people in the house when they’re deceased. In the old days, you had your Granny and your Granddad, they were kept in the house —

Lily: — And they all lived together —

Alan: — Whereas now, they don’t keep them in the house; they just want them out of the house (Transcript of Interview with L, A & T Stevenson 22.7.2014: 1205-23).

Implicit in Lily and Alan’s discussion is a comparison between ‘then’ and ‘now’, a change and some discordant views about whether this is significant or not. Lily proposes that nowadays death decisively changes living people’s feelings

toward their loved ones. Although someone may have nursed a dying person, the moment of their death marks an end to that kind of care, and when people become dead they do not ‘belong’ in the home anymore (Mellor and Shilling 1993). Lily also suggests that, within families, the expectation of immediate corpse removal is related to a shift in living arrangements, with generations of families now living separately. While, ‘in the old days’ the deceased remained at home, contemporary homes are now exclusively places for the living. Alan’s comment here suggests that the firm is removing the deceased from their homes rather than from hospitals or care centres, and that nowadays customers care more about immediately removing the dead and less about inconveniencing funeral directors with their demands for late-night removals. But deaths at home are something increasingly rare, and Alan’s allusion to the continued prevalence of home deaths suggests an interest in portraying the present as though similar to the past (when the majority of deaths did occur at home).

However, the gradual separation of living from dead involves unevenness and irregularities.

Alan: I feel people used to wait a lot longer.
 People would phone you – if their Mum died at three in the morning, they definitely wouldn’t phone you at three in the morning; they’d wait until 9 o’clock and phone you at 9 o’clock —
 Lily: — Not in our day they didn’t.
 Tobias: Welllll I don’t know if they did.
 Alan: Very rarely did we get called out in the middle of the night.
 Tobias: I’ve seen it when there were a death in the morning and they say, “Come back at night with the hearse”.
 Lily: We used to – we had a flat round where our garage is in [Street address], we lived above the garage, Toby and I, and ehm, I remember one night, like, he was away at a death and I was on the phones, and I’m hanging out the window waiting for him coming, “Don’t put the hearse away, you got to go back out again!” and this was at three in the morning! But then you never hear anything about that... (Transcript of Interview with L, A & T Stevenson 22.7.2014: 1029-46).

The traditional picture is one of the deceased remaining at home for longer, juxtaposed against the contemporary interest in the deceased being removed as soon as possible. However, the Stevensons' comments highlight the unevenness of developing expectations regarding how quickly corpses are to be removed after a death at home (as noted, increasingly rare). Lily's generalisation about immediate removals being a recent development in the previous quotation is at odds with her memory of Tobias's late night removals here. While Alan and Tobias maintain that customers once wanted the deceased to remain at home for longer, Lily points up notable exceptions, stating 'you never hear anything about' them, and thereby calling into question the generalisation she had made, and which her husband and son are now making. What can be gleaned from this exchange is that a general trend exists, but with exceptions that are downplayed. Another such generalisation pertains to mourners not wanting their dead loved ones 'brought home' for the viewing, but this also varies.

Nolan: ...Another issue is that, especially with the Irish families, a lot of people want their loved ones brought back home. A family will say, "Well, you brought Granny home ten years ago, so why can't you bring Granddad?" and we can't tell them that Granddad is too heavy to make it up the stairs. We want everything to be dignified, so it's an issue. Now, we get somebody out to the home to scope things out and make a risk assessment. If the stairs look iffy, we have to say "no". We don't want to risk dropping the coffin, or having it look bad (Fieldnotes of Interview with N Hardy 18.7.2014: 147-55).

Nolan's remark implies that people do want their dead loved ones at home, but that the funeral firm will sometimes not do this because it is too great a liability and would upset the customer/s.

It is difficult to reconcile the shift in corpse removal preferences with the individualising shift that has occurred for funerals. Although there is reportedly a growing interest in expediently removing the dead, the celebratory and personal aspects of funerals counter this by extending the perceived liminal status of the dead person, as discussed earlier. Bringing the deceased home, when considered in terms of a liability, also calls into question how many customers continue to want home

viewings and want the deceased kept in the home, but are told it cannot be done. Given this example, it appears there are limits to the all-accommodating approaches of independent funeral directors, but these limits are presented in terms of being in customers' best interests. The axiom that 'The customer is always correct' does not hold here, and instead the funeral director is correct, a point returned to later.

Is this a sequestration of death? A denial of death? Rather than literal ideas about public and private (as in Mellor 1992; Mellor and Shilling 1993; Willmott 2000), there are aspects at play here pertaining to how people relate to one another in terms of the dying and death processes, as Elias (1979[2010]) comments. Since the dead are no longer prepared and viewed at home, they have no place there after the moment of their death; the funeral parlour is the place for the dead. Stanley and Wise (2011) and Howarth (2000) highlight how the sequestration thesis presupposes questionable dichotomies not only between public and private, but also between living and dead, as if there is nothing in between these states. This is mirrored in the experiences of place throughout the funeral arrangement process. What underpins the sequestration thesis is the idea that when people are sequestered they are no longer 'fully' alive. However, the idea of liminality counters any binary separation by instead conceiving life and death in processual terms, something Elias (1979[2010]) also does in *The Loneliness of the Dying*. Traditionally, funerals functioned as the culmination of death as a rite of passage and allowed for closure and recognition of death. However, the ways in which funeral directors perceive their customers' interests in life-celebrating funerals, together with how they act to shield customers from the realities of death during the funeral arrangement process, reduces the death aspects (Seale 1998; Walter 1994; McCarthy 2016). And the separation between living and dead as a result is in some cases becoming more pronounced.

In Goffmanesque terms, the 'backstage' practices of funeral directors are also extending. In the past, it was often the case that many of the procedures, including arranging the service, laying out and the wake, took place in home environments (Frisby 2015; Davies 2002; Gittings 1984; Litten 1991, 1997). Likewise, funeral parlours of an earlier era were areas of homes. However, as views about the dead shifted, more and more of the arrangement process was transferred to a funeral

parlour (Parsons 2003a). Funeral firms gradually remodelled these to include places for the living (customers) which resembled both rooms in homes and offices.

Carl: ...I took over for my father, and renovated the premises a year ago. The place [front door] used to open onto a hallway with offices off it. I didn't think that worked well for today's business. Undertakers used to visit the family then, rather than having them come here, so it made sense. I knocked out a wall, painted, bought new furniture, put in central heating and moved all the paperwork and offices upstairs. That doesn't need to be down here. Downstairs should be a place to see clients (Fieldnotes of Interview with C Dickens 6.6.2014: 49-57).

Carl's renovation was to appear as a business of 'today', where frontstage places are reserved for the living. Although his description designates downstairs as a place for the living, he makes no mention of where the dead now belong. Where do they go now? Were they there in the past? Funeral parlours in previous centuries did not often have on-site storage facilities, as bodies were previously prepared and laid out in the homes of their customers, and because funeral directors ran their firms out of their family homes.

George: I grew up in this house. We're sitting in what used to be our sitting room. We've never had any bodies here; we've got no storage or refrigerators in this building. We bought the place down the road later because we needed it, but there have never been bodies here. Back then, we only had the downstairs open to people. You saw that office on your way in. That's all we needed. Then we had to expand (Fieldnotes of Interview with G Stevenson 26.6.2014: 116-23).

George's comment that 'We've never had any bodies here...there have never been bodies here' initially seemed something he emphasised to comfort me. However, he was perhaps referring to the firm's longevity, with R L Stevenson & Son having predated the need for on-site body refrigerators. Interestingly, rather than installing storage facilities at their original parlour when the need arose, the Stevensons chose to purchase an off-site facility for this. The parlour, and George's childhood home, remains a place exclusively for the living, and the dead are placed at a distance

‘down the road’. George described his family converting their two-floor home to include an increasing number of offices and reception areas for customers, with the family first moving upstairs and then to another house. In effect, the rising demands of business ‘evicted’ the Stevensons from their home, and on a wider scale other firms began renovating their existing spaces to become viewing rooms and function rooms. The Melvilles, for example, converted their wood workshop into a chapel of rest (Fieldnotes of Interview with H, C & A Melville 8.7.2014: 140-43). Given the presence of customers on the premises, and in tandem with changing views about death, the practices pertaining to preparing the deceased were pushed out of view.

Within present-day parlours as spaces designated for the living, death is remarkably absent. Frontstage, everything is quietly calm, there are comfortable sofas and tissue boxes, and no reminders of death. Backstage, however, there are deadlines, workbenches, shrink-wrapped coffins, gurneys, preparation tables and – depending on the storage setup of a given firm – a number of dead bodies. In short, backstage areas centre around the realities of disposal, which have been removed from frontstage areas. Funeral directors are the mediators of the separation between these realms (Howarth 1992), guiding their customers through the arrangement process in ways which shield them from the realities of death and disposal. Death is behind closed doors, and customers are encouraged to contemplate the happy memories of life instead. Ted’s example below also suggests that funeral directors’ regulatory practices have expanded to encompass spaces outside the parlour:

Ted: *[Points to the minivan and opens the boot. The back seats have been removed and replaced with a custom-built wooden structure with metal troughs in it and some other fastenings – for sliding coffins or gurneys in and out. Looks like the firm built it themselves because it fits perfectly inside the van].* Most undertakers have a huge van to get bodies – those can fit 4 to 5 bodies. We have one that fits two because it feels more personal. Most of the time we only put one body in it; we like to keep it to one body. It’s far better bringing the body home in a minivan, and having only one body when we open it up (Fieldnotes of Interview with T Orwell 30.6.2014: 421-31).

Ted's comment about removals, like the Stevensons' earlier comments, assumes that deceased people are removed from their family homes rather than hospitals and care centres, that the deceased will be 'brought home', and that their loved ones will be present for this. Given his view of the minivan as a 'better' choice, Ted's comment also implies that G Orwell Funeral Services' practice of individually transporting bodies is done to comfort the living and to show respect for the dead. There are several points to be made about this practice. First, it is now unusual to transport bodies from the home, as the majority of Britons die in hospitals and care facilities. Second, this points up the bespoke nature of the firm's services. Third, transporting bodies separately extends the expectation of privacy beyond the confines of life. This provides a sense of continuity, for the home lives of the living come with a certain expectation of privacy and so does the time they will spend at the funeral parlour. Fourth, it gives a personal touch and shelters customers from potential worries about their loved ones being kept in a nameless storage facility. Fifthly and perhaps most importantly, it downplays the death as having occurred: hearses are for dead people, but minivans are for the living and transporting the deceased to and from their family homes in vehicles other than a hearse extends the period of implied liminality.

Has there been a sequestration? Of what kind? In what ways are the independent funeral directors seeing this? In funeral parlours, there appears to be more of a sequestration of the customer than a sequestration of the dead. Funeral directors and the deceased both regularly belong in funeral parlours, or as Augé (1997) might say they have a place there. And while the funeral directors and the deceased they prepare readily belong in funeral parlours, customers do not belong in the same way. The arrangement process constitutes a short-term reason for customers' presence in funeral parlours, and funeral directors' guidance and management of them only reinforces that they are visitors. As such customers have far less of a place (a 'non-place') in funeral parlours than the corpses hidden from their view.

v. transactions: who is the customer? who is the family?

Within a transactional framework (Van Maanen and Barley 1984; Auh et al. 2007; Bitner 1992; Johnstone 2012), the focus is on customers and matters of arranging the

funeral. However, the funeral director is concerned with orchestrating a funeral rather than the grief and loss of the customer, and for them the key reason for customers being at a parlour is to make arrangements. Death is managed and customers are shepherded through spaces for the living with a guarded reverence. As such, funeral directors and their customers experience being in funeral parlours in markedly different ways: funeral directors belong and are at home, while customers are there only intermittently to make arrangements. This is a ‘non-place’ (Augé 1997) or lack of belonging experienced by customers and it has ramifications for how the funeral directors perceive them.

The interviews suggest the directors have experienced a shift in understanding who ‘the customer’ is, and what ‘family’ means. In association with these shifts and resulting ambiguities, funerary wishes can be dis/articulated in accordance with how many proxies for the deceased person are involved in the funeral processes. In the interviews, the relationship of those who organised the funeral to the deceased person was reduced to being ‘the family’ or ‘the customer’. These two terms were normally used interchangeably in explaining funeral arrangement processes (Walter 2016a; Bailey 2010). The funeral directors’ explanations of typical funeral arrangements invited the assumption that ‘the customer’ is synonymous with ‘the family’ perhaps because of the frequency with which family members in the past handled funeral arrangements, and so connected with their interest in explaining the present as though bearing the traditional hallmarks of the past. But why is ‘family’ the homogenising term of choice? It may be because, from the vantage point of the funeral directors, the sanctity of their work relates to a paradigm of conservatism resting upon family, family values, tradition, community, heteronormativity and the like. As a relatively conservative group, they are rooted in a landscape where these factors are perceived as fundamental to the continuation of their businesses, and they do not appear to acknowledge other kinds of relationships between the deceased and their loved ones. For example, there was no mention funerals for gay men surrounding the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s (Howarth 1993), where the deceased often had no ‘family’ but many other loving people instead.

Who becomes involved and the relationships at play are always specific matters and are unique to each particular funeral. In terms of arranging funerals,

however, the funeral directors seem not to consider the particularities of the relationships involved to be relevant. Instead, what is important is whether ‘the customer’ (whoever that may be) was satisfied with the funeral, whether guests were pleased and whether payment was made. Likewise, the terms ‘funeral consumer’, ‘customer’ and ‘client’ have been used interchangeably through this thesis. Before beginning fieldwork, ‘funeral consumer’ was used to designate all those who are not funeral directors and are involved in any aspect of arranging the funeral. Perhaps encouraged by the funeral directors and their homogenising terminologies, I did not make distinctions regarding their relationships with the deceased, or whether the customers were indeed making arrangements for their own subsequent funeral.

Who then is the customer? Is it whoever pays? Or whoever is present in making the arrangements? Is it the now-deceased person? Relatedly, who is ‘the family’? Are family members axiomatically considered the customers? Are family members necessarily biological relations of the deceased, and what about close colleagues, and friends who are ‘like family?’ Perhaps most importantly, why do these particularities seem secondary or indeed irrelevant to the funeral directors? The response here is that the particularities of relationships are largely secondary because the importance of the arrangement process centres around the end-product of the funeral itself and whether it is paid for. Furthermore, although the people involved are unique to each funeral, there is a discernible pattern in explanations of the arrangement process. Even in situations where the now-deceased person has pre-arranged their own funeral, or else conveyed via their Will exactly what their funeral should be comprised of, there is usually one or more living person acting as their proxy in the funeral arrangements. These may be the family, friends or colleagues of the now-deceased. And as is most often the case with social situations, the more people who become involved, the more complicated it then becomes to discern responsibility and ‘the customer’, so a homogenising term covers all.

The customer’s ‘job’ is to instruct the funeral director regarding how to arrange a funeral and optimally this is premised on the deceased’s instructions. The point of fulfilling the deceased’s instructions is not about posthumous satisfaction, but about honouring now-deceased people by providing what they ‘would have wanted’ in the event they were still living. However, the process of deciding what the deceased

‘would have wanted’ can involve different interpretations and agendas (Hockey 1996: 46). There is often more than one person acting as customer on behalf of the deceased, and their interpretation can obscure these wishes. The result can often become ‘what I think s/he wanted’. Lily comments, for example:

Lily: Do you know what people think of burial – this generation and that, “oh, standing out in the rain...”, and you know, “I’ll just cremate them”. And one of them’ll say, “Aye, but Mum wanted to be buried”, “Oh we’re not going to... we’ll just cremate her”. Excuse me! Your mother wanted to be buried! *[laughs]* But they didn’t bother, they just – And I’ve seen it in somebody’s Will: they wanted to be buried, and the family say, “No... we’ll just cremate them” *[laughs]* (Transcript of Interview with L, A & T Stevenson 22.7.2014: 1206-24).

Lily here sees ‘the customer’ as both the now-deceased mother and her children, and her comment in terms of ‘one of them’ underscores that she does not distinguish between the living people involved. Despite the mother’s Will indicating her wish to be buried, her children’s view of burial meant they organised their response around their knowledge of their mother and what she ‘actually’ wanted. While I was not told which disposal method was ultimately decided upon, this comment exemplifies the clashing views that can arise when different people attempt to interpret what a deceased person ‘would have wanted’, and also that the funeral directors can act as arbitrators in such circumstances.

This multiplicity of interpretations can also result in an account of the dead person that is not considered authentic by funeral guests (Bailey and Walter 2016: 8).

Horace: We’ll be standing at the back [of the chapel] chuckling because they’ve got some kid to read a poem and they cry and it’s a mess. But I guess that’s the point. People throwing themselves across coffins, or crying through the service...At the end [of the service], we’ll be standing out at the doors to greet people, and we’ll have people coming up to us saying, “That wasn’t the so-and-so I remembered”. The other week, a woman died, and [during the service] her daughter was talking about how her mother used to go to concerts at Royal

Albert Hall all the time, and basically listing other high profile activities she did... and her friends and the people who knew her remembered her very differently (Fieldnotes of Interview with H, C & A Melville 8.7.2014: 389-402).

Horace's comment might seem insensitive here, but he was signalling his allegiance to the deceased as well as an interest in ensuring that all funeral-goers leave a funeral with the feeling that it was 'a good send-off'. Customers' intrusions can prevent this, and Horace's example concerns what happens when customers pursue their own agendas in funeral proceedings rather than focusing on how the deceased person would have wanted to be remembered (Bailey and Walter 2016; Holloway et al. 2013). Moreover, his comments underscore his understanding that there is a 'right way' of doing funerals and that he is an expert on this. Horace's mention of the funeral-goers approaching him to say "that wasn't the so-and-so I remembered" also suggests that he feels unfairly blamed for his customers' conduct, with ideas about authenticity becoming increasingly present as more funerals adopt a life-centred personalised approach.

The funeral itself is perhaps nowadays the most important piece of advertising for funeral firms, and is seen as reflecting directly upon the directors' capabilities. In turn, who the customer is and whether the specifics of 'the customer' are relevant points to changes around the 'taming' of death, changes in community structure and a shifting of focus away from death-acknowledgement and toward life-remembrance. Furthermore, as funeral arrangements become increasingly complex and personalised with a focus on the funeral as-event, the particularities of the people involved perhaps become less significant to funeral directors. The directors I interviewed often remarked that 'every funeral is different', but they did not say the same of their clients.

As funerals become increasingly personalised, the accompanying arrangement process conversely seem to be becoming less focused on the particulars of the customers involved. These are the family of X dead person, they are helping to make the arrangements and they will pay us. Memorable customers, or at least those who the funeral directors told me about, were those who spent exorbitant sums or who caused problems, with all others resting unremarkably within the realm of 'family'

and with normal behaviour not meriting comment. Just as the customer is placeless in the funeral parlour, so too they are not the focus of efforts for the directors. The contemporary customer has no strong purpose in the funeral process beyond relaying information and paying, and is thus not central.

Shifts in community dynamics, commented on in Chapter Three, have much to do with how ‘the customer’ has become homogenised. Once upon a time, there were communities in which people interacted on the basis of localised geographical belonging (placeness). Local people conversed over shop counters or at church, and there were local realities where ‘everyone knew everyone’ and everyone knew the local funeral directors. Julian, for example, described his great-grandparents as ‘pillars of the community’ (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 131). Given that many long-term customers have moved elsewhere, the relationship between funeral firms and their locales have changed. Community changes have manifested in a disarticulation of community into many distinct places, with the funeral director attempting to re-engage in each.

Julian: Community is changing. Now there are many communities. There are many different communities in [City] now. We try to make good with as many as we can. We do community events, we go to churches (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 156-9).

While funeral directors still attend churches (in the plural) and still participate in charitable community activities, these are now done more as marketing tactics. Julian’s remarks about there now being ‘many communities’ in the local area suggests a fracturing and diversification having replaced the traditional community norm of a singular shared placeness among local inhabitants. He presents the firm’s efforts in terms of ‘making good’, but these practices are forms of marketing because the funeral directors have no decisive place in many of the communities other than as representatives of a business. Funeral directors are no longer universally known within the local communities, and so they act as advertisements. Remembering Alex’s comments about not being seen in the pub (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Wilde 1.7.2014: 146) and Ted’s remark about not over-indulging in alcohol in public (Fieldnotes of Interview with T Orwell 30.6.2014: 165-7), funeral directors comport

themselves as if everyone is a would-be customer. In effect, the ways in which funeral directors navigate the communities surrounding their firms reduce everyone to ‘customer’ because they may all be purchasing funerals in the future. And this homogenising of potential customers does not entirely fade once they become actual ones. Perhaps relating to the placelessness of customers in the funeral parlour, funeral directors seem to view them as the counterpart of a binary relationship: funeral directors and customers, us and them. Remembering Horace’s comment in Chapter Three, that ‘We participate in these things [community events] – partly because it’s part of the job’ (Fieldnotes of Interview with H, C & A Melville 8.7.2014: 243-4), this also points to community involvement as a form of marketing. As it stands now, funeral directors have a limited place in contemporary diverse community structures, and customers have limited place in funeral parlours.

To address the question in the title of this section, ‘the customer’ and ‘the family’ are both archetypes of the past which have been transmuted, homogenised and applied in the independent funeral directors’ accounts of present-day arrangement processes. Death-ignoring social trends coupled with the shielding practices of funeral directors have manifested in arrangement processes which now pertain more to life-remembrance than death, with the focus shifting away from grieving customers and onto the deceased and the funeral. There is also the added factor of the customer being tied to the transaction, while for the funeral directors the deceased’s commemoration is of central concern. Were the focus to be on the death itself and the grief of the living, the ‘customer’ would perhaps become more remarkable to funeral directors via having a more substantial part in the arrangement process. Instead, customers are proxies for dead people (Benziman 2016; Partridge 1981). The dead person matters, as his or her life provides the foundation for the contemporary funeral. The living ‘customers’ however are now operating on behalf of the deceased. The transaction itself has become more important as an event and the customers are downplayed.

vi. the past, the present, and a changing temporal order?

The independent funeral directors interviewed have a romanticised view of the past and a dystopic view of the present. Theirs is overall a binary understanding of

funeral firms in the industry, presented in terms of us-versus-them, good-versus-bad, and progress-versus-regression. From the arrival of the Co-operative's funeral services in the 1920s on, the independent directors put forward a negative view of the industry's development (Parsons 2014: 113-25). Their us-versus-them stance toward the conglomerate firms, discussed in earlier chapters, seems to involve more than simply worry over competition. Underlying this is the view that the conglomerates embody a regression, that they are disrupting and retrogressive while superficially modern, and that thereby they contribute to the potential demise of traditional funerary practices. The markers of this are found in their shared assumptions regarding how the conglomerate firms conduct themselves. They are presented as having emerged within the British funeral industry from nowhere and then doing it 'wrong'. Most often competitors arrive in an industry and find success where there are gaps or problems due to difficulties or omissions in the industry at the point of their arrival. However, the presence of the conglomerate firms was presented to me as inexplicable as well as increasingly damaging.

Through their accounts of the funeral industry, the independent directors are, in Eliasian terms, acting to 'other' the conglomerates by positioning them as complete outsiders, with independent firms presented by contrast as the established group (Elias and Scotson 1965[2008]). The independent directors see the conglomerate firms as coterminous, with Dignity Plc and the Co-operative Funeralcare largely discussed as though a matching set and homogenised around emphasising the large-scale centralisation of their operations. For example, Arthur commented:

Arthur: The Co-op and Dignity are pretty much the same thing now: hubs, head office, branches around hubs (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Huxley 4.9.2014: 99-100).

As was the case with accounts of 'the customer' being reduced to main functions, the Co-operative Funeralcare and Dignity Plc are perhaps considered as coterminous because both are seen to pose similar threats and make similar 'mistakes'. The conglomerate directors are purportedly characterised by an overt interest in profit margins, which shifts social perceptions about funeral directors in general as exploitative away from the independent firms and onto the conglomerates. Alistair, in Chapter Four, saw Dignity and Co-op branches 'popping up everywhere' and

structuring their businesses ‘like the French’ (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Stoker 4.6.2014: 212-9). This relates to the accompanying assumption that people who work in the conglomerates have not undergone the same generational and traditional socialisation processes as the independent directors and so do not possess the requisite knowledge to work as ‘proper’ funeral directors. Sloan’s comment, also in Chapter Four, was that the Co-operative Funeralcare had hired as a managing director someone whose previous employment was purportedly heading the Co-op’s margarine company (Fieldnotes of Interview with S Shakespeare 4.6.2014: 322-5). The general subtext is that conglomerate directors, because lacking birth and calling and an associated apprenticeship, have little idea about the specialist practices, manners and standards intrinsic to properly arranging funerals.

The independent directors suggested that the main reasons the conglomerate firms have been successful are because of their large number of locations, and the lack of consumer knowledge about prices:

Nolan: Yes, Dignity is far more expensive. The Co-op is more expensive too... but smaller family firms can charge less because they don’t have as much to keep running, I suppose. And now, the Co-op has branches all over – everywhere (Fieldnotes of Interview with N Hardy 18.7.2014: 295-8).

Nolan’s assertion that conglomerate firms charge more for funerals is the reverse of the general view that Dignity and particularly the Co-operative Funeralcare are comparatively less expensive than independent funeral firms. Family and social network patterns are perhaps important factors to consider here. This signals a possible figurational effect around the arrangements and is in-line with what many of the directors told me regarding their firms providing lower prices for all-inclusive funeral packages. For them, it is not only the case that conglomerate prices are higher, but also that charges are manipulated.

George: Dignity embalms everyone who goes in there, because then they can charge for it. Dignity charges so much for so little: they don’t touch catering – we do that for our clients. They don’t touch printing or much else, and they charge more (Fieldnotes of Interview with G Stevenson 26.6.2014: 172-6).

Contemporary independent funeral firms like R L Stevenson & Son are often one-stop-shops providing all necessary services for the funeral and accompanying reception (Dickenson 2012), and this practice is considered by the interviewees to be the ‘right way’ of arranging funerals. In suggesting that conglomerate firms are standardising options like embalming but not handling what are seen as baseline tasks such as programme printing and arranging catering, George is implying that they are acting unprofessionally and taking advantage of people’s lack of knowledge in order to do less for a higher price. But it is increasingly common to have a funeral weeks or sometimes longer after a person dies. The timeline may be slower out of necessity for an inquest, or out of interest in allowing funeral-goers ample travel time. There is also the possibility of repatriating a body to another country, in which case embalming is compulsory. As such, embalming has become more of a necessary factor in funeral preparations, and certainly more of a central concern than printed programmes and ordering food. However, the independent directors seem to take issue with Dignity’s supposed practice of universal embalming, firstly because customers are supposedly not given the choice of whether to embalm or not, and secondly because they allegedly call it ‘hygienic treatment’ and do not explain that term to their customers (Fieldnotes of Interview with H, C & A Melville 8.7.2014: 314-18). Schäfer (2007) notes that many firms used the term ‘hygienic treatment’ because it was understood to be more psychologically beneficial to the mourners (Schäfer 2007: 10). However, Dignity’s website conversely advises that ‘We are able to provide an embalming service if required’ (Dignity Plc 2016), suggesting that they call it ‘embalming’ rather than ‘hygienic treatment’ and that it is not compulsory. But regardless of freely-available evidence, independent funeral directors continue to make claims of this kind. Julian put forward similar ideas about customers:

Julian: The Co-op has the reputation of being
 “by the people for the people”, and so on, but
 they’re also no good. And a lot of the time, our
 funerals are less expensive but people wouldn’t
 know because they look at appearances and
 don’t want to admit they made a mistake, so
 they keep going back [*mimics mock*
conversation]:
 “I used the Co-op for mum, so I will
 again.”

“But you said they weren’t very good, and that they overcharged you?”

“No...they weren’t that bad.”

People don’t know how much funerals cost, or what’s ‘reasonable’, so if they’re sitting in a nice room [*gestures vaguely around the room*], they often assume they’re getting ripped off versus at a Co-op branch storefront [often simply furnished], where they’ll assume it’s reasonable (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 363-75).

Here, Julian suggests that customers tend to assume that the Co-operative Funeralcare provides cost-effective funerals and this, together with their willingness to overlook negative past experiences, explains why the conglomerates have been successful. He explains this in black-and-white terms, in generalising about all Co-op branches being ‘no good’, something likely to be based on stories told by other independent directors. Julian’s presentation of a mock conversation about choosing the Co-operative Funeralcare is one which he could never have heard, and this underscores the assumptions he is making about customers as well as presenting himself as all-knowing. His emphasis on the customer’s interest in cost-effective funerals also suggests a regression fuelled by consumer behaviour: that since customers are overly concerned with prices, they forego quality to the detriment of proper independent firms and their quality services. Julian suggests that customers are uninformed and so cannot recognise how the well-appointed decoration and furnishings of independent funeral firms translates into quality funeral services, rather than profit. These assumptions reduce to a view of customers as ignorant and basing their decisions on the appearance of the premises.

Julian: Dignity and the Co-op do take a good amount of our business. People will go to the Co-op because it looks like the cheaper option, or they’ll go to Dignity because it sounds nice. People don’t really know what to look for. If you were just an average person looking for a funeral, you’d probably end up going with the Co-op because you didn’t know any better. Most people do (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Doyle 2.6.2014: 389-95).

People choosing the Co-operative Funeralcare is not actually a new development and has been happening for many decades (Parsons 2014: 113-16). In addition, Julian’s

remark that conglomerate firms ‘take a good deal of our business’ implies that all funerals rightfully ‘belong’ to the independent firms at large, and that customers’ uninformed choices underpin the problem of present competition. While few studies of funeral price knowledgeability have been conducted (Bern-Klug et al. 1999; Garman and Kidd 1982; Kopp and Kemp 2007), it is certainly the case that ‘the customer’ is understandably preoccupied, and is buying something nobody wants to have to buy (Theron 2013: 1). It is entirely understandable that they are unaware of what is necessary for a funeral and what the requisite goods and services should cost, and so they necessarily make choices based on what sounds reasonable. Moreover, prices vary greatly depending on locale and other factors. Influencing such decisions is also the relatively consistent media coverage about independent funeral firms taking financial advantage of customers, but this was never mentioned or hinted at to me. Although consumer lack of knowledge is not new, the independent funeral directors seem to have only recently taken notice of it, because according to them it is what is leading to customers being taken advantage of by the conglomerate firms. In other words, it is naivety that encourages customers to choose the ‘wrong’ firms, not pricing structures. These arguments paint a romanticised history where, before the conglomerates arrived on the scene, customers trusted their local (independent) funeral director to provide them with quality services at a fair price. But now the ‘mistreatment’ of customers that results from them choosing conglomerate firms over independent ones is understood as evidence of the deterioration in the funeral industry brought about by the conglomerates.

Alistair: The Co-op embalms all their bodies – it’s policy and they don’t give customers the option. Here, it’s optional except for repatriations. I like to give them the choice. When they screw up – them or Dignity, we get a lot of their upset families and then we have to move the body to our place. Dignity screws up a lot. And they keep growing... (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Stoker 4.6.2014: 110-17).

Alistair presented his firm’s rectification of the conglomerate firms’ regular mistakes to be a disruptive occurrence rather than an opportunity to make money. He seemed more concerned with the fact that conglomerate firms are making mistakes and not doing their proper duty as funeral directors, thereby causing problems for the

profession at large. But despite their continued mistakes, Dignity and the Co-operative Funeralcare ‘keep growing’.

For independent funeral directors, how things should play out is built upon the foundation of how things did play out in their rosy histories of previous generations. In the past, funeral directing did not involve competition from ‘the outside’, but just among equals, between the independent funeral firms alone. Harking back to a romanticised past where competition was local and against worthy rivals, the independent directors bemoan the present in which time and money is wasted by having to unite against the conglomerate firms. They need to defend their trade from those unworthy of joining its ranks. And these people and firms are seen as unworthy because, having no birthright or grounded history in the industry, they are unable to perceive how things ‘should’ be and how things ‘should’ progress naturally. The independent directors understand the conglomerate firms as having no place in the business of funerals. With their perception of themselves as guardians of the industry, the independent directors see the conglomerates as renegades meddling with the industry’s natural processes of development, and thus ruining a trade which their ancestors had cultivated and protected for generations.

All of this has to do with a presupposed temporal order of things, and how this is managed. Although not explicitly stated in interviews, piecing together the small and everyday information given reveals a temporal order in the independent funeral directors’ perceptions. This temporal order involves a process in which practices evolve over the generations with the traditions (seemingly) persisting as they have done and with changes happening when the funeral directors think they ‘should’. However, while it seems plausible for funeral directors to have some say in the development of their own businesses, deciding when things should change on a grand scale suggests control over social development at large, which from an Eliasian perspective is something no one person or group is capable of (Elias 1970[2012], 1987[2010]). This ordering also relies on a series of social structures which are deteriorating and reforming in incompatible ways. However, the independent funeral directors pinned any present day irregularities in the temporal order on the conglomerates. They expressed contempt toward the conglomerates for two key reasons. First, they do not share the same history and tradition; and second,

their lack of historical belonging to the established traditional framework is producing results which are seen as ruining the funeral industry.

Largely, but with a few notable exceptions, the funeral directors I interviewed presented the development of the industry in stark either/or terms. Was this for my benefit, or do they actually understand the development of the funeral industry this way? The agenda may be that they do not want to share with any incoming groups, and as such are preoccupied with discrediting newer arrivals. The conglomerate firms are seen as disruptive not only in terms of everyday funeral work, but also with regard to the future development of the industry. They are regularly making mistakes and misunderstanding how the funeral industry operates and develops. Remembering Arthur's comment in Chapter Three, 'This business is about understanding the past and trying to visualise the future. You can't do one without the other' (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Huxley 4.9.2014: 267-8), their disrupting presence is seen to stem from a lack of know-how pertaining to the natural progression of the perceived temporal ordering that the independent directors understand to be self-evident. Arthur continued in saying that as a funeral director, 'You have to build on something' (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Huxley 4.9.2014: 280). This suggests by contrast that the conglomerate 'interference' is having a deteriorating effect because lacking foundation in the habitus and traditional practices of the independent firms. The conglomerates hold an increasing percentage of the market share, but are viewed as lacking a proper foundation in what is considered important by the independent directors. They buy up independent firms, erode the existing foundational qualities there, and continue on. And if they continue in this way, they will ruin everything the independent firms have built up over the course of generations. The conglomerate firms, for the independent funeral directors, have thereby tipped the scales in the direction of 'barbarism', de/civilising (Elias 1989a[2013]).

To address the question in the section title, is there a changing temporal order? The independent directors make either/or comparisons between themselves and the conglomerates, which indicates a linear understanding of time which accounts for their own in-group beliefs about what should happen, and when. Theirs is presumptively the 'correct' way forward, and the outsiders will prevent improvements and shift things backward. Seeing themselves as having a birthright

and a calling encourages the independent directors to presuppose they have a monopoly over the development of ‘their’ industry. Through this, it has become apparent that the perception of temporal ordering discussed here is founded upon the group’s habitus. Elias argues, ‘There is a widespread tendency among members of these societies to regard as entirely their own only what they perceive as a gift of nature or perhaps the gods’ (Elias 1984[2007]: 111). Remembering Lily’s example of what is considered ‘normal’ among independent funeral firms, and despite ample evidence to the contrary, there is also an idealised expectation that the status quo of tradition, birthright and calling will continue without change and the existence of the conglomerate firms is an affront to this.

vii. the future and its silences

The independent funeral directors I interviewed have an idea of the past, present and future and how they fit together, and their negative views about the future of the funeral industry are coloured by this not playing out as it ‘should’ at the present time. The interviews illuminate an overarching framework to do with their belief that the practices of long-standing independent firms represent the ‘right’ way to do things which are in line with the forces of civility and improvement. These were in turn presented in contrast with their competitors (conglomerate firms) who represent the ‘wrong’ way, as forces of decivilising barbarism. This is to do with boundaries between groups. The conglomerate directors, referred to by independent directors as ‘they’ or ‘them’, operate outside of the habitus of the independent firms. As such there are persistent parallels between this established–outsider relationship, and the ones Elias discusses (Elias and Scotson 1965[2008]; Elias 1976[2008], 1990a[2008]). Having generational knowledge of how things should progress, the independent funeral directors understand themselves as the guardians of the British funeral industry’s development, and so as representing the bigger picture which has developed and persisted over time but is now being disrupted.

Any evidence of the future not playing out as it ‘should’ and as though departing from a trajectory set by the traditional past is blamed on the conglomerate firms, or else glossed over and silenced. This practice not only suggests the independent funeral directors’ tacit belief in them having control over the industry’s

development, but also an avoidance of or disregard for contradictory factors. Similar to what Adorno (2002/1994) argues about readers of astrological columns, independent funeral directors seem to embrace any examples that fit with their image of the way the future of their industry should develop, and downplay whatever does not by reducing it to conglomerate firms and their uninformed interloping. Mounting evidence suggests that the industry's future will not resemble the traditional model which the independent funeral directors prize; and according to them, the present is being tampered with. However, the conglomerate firms' activities were represented to me as a short-term blip when considering the perceived longevity of established independent firms, and their presence as having little to do with broader social trends and consumer interests. Arthur even suggested that the Co-operative Funeralcare would be sold to either Tesco or Marks & Spencer within the next few years (Fieldnotes of Interview with A Huxley 4.9.2014: 289-93). The independent funeral directors' comments on the future suggest that the unwelcome developments are only temporary and confined to the shorter-term, and that eventually the traditional independent firms will prevail.

As the interviewees see it, there is a great difference between the independent firms and their conglomerate competitors regarding how and when aspects of their business and available services should change. For example, while secular funeral services are now widely available at independent funeral firms, the Co-operative Funeralcare's early offering of secular services (Jupp and Walter 1999: 263; Parsons 2014: 113-25) was at the time seen as a deteriorating presence. The considerably later adoption of secular options by the independent firms was glossed over, and that these were initially treated by them as an unwelcome phenomenon was not mentioned. Instead, and interpreted as decisive evidence of their lack of understanding, the independent directors describe the conglomerate firms as misreading the perceived temporal specificity of the trajectory of change:

Sloan: The Co-op thinks people want to buy their own coffins online, but I think it's too early.

Emilia: [*Nodded in agreement*] Yes, I think my generation will start to want that, but it's too soon. We're not executing funerals yet for the most part.

Sloan: Exactly! (Fieldnotes of Interview with S Shakespeare 4.6.2014: 310-16).

Although the Co-operative Funeralcare has provided downloadable coffin and casket brochures which include details and prices, there is (as yet) no way for customers to purchase coffins online. Moreover, the provision of online brochures is also a practice of some independent firms, including O Wilde & Sons. Sloan's further comment suggests 'people' acting as customers are all the same in their reservations about buying coffins online, reduced to 'too early', thereby homogenising customers and reiterating his certainty about 'the right way' of doing things. Horace and Clancy expressed similar views with regard to internet technologies in their work.

Horace: I think eventually most of the face-to-face things will happen online, but it's too soon now. The generation that's burying people isn't interested in that.

Clancy: Yes, the people arranging funerals now are in their 60s or 70s, they're just on the edge of the 'John Lewis click-and-collect' line, but they'd rather not. (Fieldnotes of Interview with H, C & A Melville 8.7.2014: 487-93).

Clancy's comment about people 'in their 60s and 70s' preferring not to use internet-based procedures in arranging funerals again homogenises. Actually, the majority of people who come in contact with the firm of H Melville & Sons will have expressed a preference for traditional transacting, rather than just those over sixty. But Clancy's statement of this claim 'as fact', however, reiterates his all-knowing understanding of 'the right way'. Implicit in these sorts of comments is that, as independent directors, they have a privileged understanding of how the funeral industry's future is playing out, and they are responsible for protecting its growth and development. As independent directors in long-standing firms, they see themselves as having long-term knowledge of how the industry has changed as well as clear ideas about what developments are possible at what points in the unfolding future. The changes they think conglomerate firms are attempting to implement now are, to them, misguided and evidence their lack of understanding about how the industry is developing naturally.

However, some independent firms, particularly those run by younger people, are implementing internet technologies in their businesses. For example, Carl has designed a smartphone application for C Dickens & Sons:

Carl: I also set up our new mobile app for Dickens's. [*He picked up an iPad that was previously on display, scrolling the firm's advertisements. He took me through the app, showing all the things people can do with it*]. This will be used much more later, I think. Right now, it's set up so that it's there and we can add new features as they become necessary (Fieldnotes of Interview with C Dickens 6.6.2014: 72-8).

Carl made a point of saying that the application is more of a placeholder for later developments, suggesting that he is in line with the traditional view among independent funeral directors – but also prepared for change. In contrast, Jamie has embraced new technology without reservation, giving it an increasing presence in the running of Kipling's Funerals. He has, for instance, begun arranging funerals via Skype and email, a practice that many older funeral directors are more hesitant to pursue.

Jamie: The website is a really big draw. We get a lot of people emailing us to arrange funerals from all over the world. They have parents here or something like that, and it makes more sense for them to email if they're out of the country. We get a lot of people arranging from Australia. Last week, we had one from Japan (Fieldnotes of Interview with J Kipling 11.7.2014: 184-91).

Jamie's remark about the website being a 'big draw' describes this as happening beyond the local, which is atypical of the traditional independent firm model as expressed to me. But while other funeral directors were sceptical of some of Jamie's decisions, he continues going his own way. Whatever the 'advanced' choices are seen to be, my interviewees never blamed fellow members of independent firms for departing from the collective trajectory of development. Whether they themselves incorporate new technologies or see this as premature, they perceive their in-group superior knowledge of the industry's development as enabling them to make informed decisions on a case-by-case basis. The conglomerate firms, on the other

hand, are perceived as having no idea how things should play out, and thus their perceived attempts to incorporate new technologies in their work process become blunders. The independent funeral directors, and especially those who are older, view the conglomerate innovations baldly as uninformed mistakes.

Conversely, even the conglomerates' attempts to observe the norms established by the independent firms are criticised, in accusing them of copying the practices of the independent firm for their own benefit, i.e. profit:

Nolan: It's getting pretty bad... especially now that they have Fairways... Fairways is the Co-op's answer to personalised funerals – family firm approach. It's a big problem because they'll be doing the same sorts of things we do. (Fieldnotes of Interview with N Hardy 18.7.2014: 304-305, 315-18).

Not only are the conglomerate firms seen as doing it 'wrong', but they are also said to be infringing by using independent firm practices, with the Fairways pre-paid plan the main example given (Co-operative Funeralcare 2015), but described as still putting profits rather than clients first. Overall, funerals by the conglomerate firms are described as depersonalised, homogenised, lacking in meaning, and often incompetently done. In fact, whatever the conglomerate firms do, they are perceived as doing it 'wrong' and this is seen as providing proof of them as a deteriorating force. They do not have the 'calling' and the knowledge, resulting in them meddling with what would otherwise be a natural process of gradual improvement. This recalls Elias and Scotson's (1965[2008]) arguments about established–outsider relationships with regard to the guilt or innocence of the outsider being secondary and their assumed character being primary. And this has more to do with their unwelcome presence in the established community than them having perpetrated any kind of offense (Elias 1990a[2008]: 214-15).

The arrival of the conglomerate firms has actually encouraged or required the independent directors to change in various ways, and also relatedly to differentiate their firms from the undesirable 'other'. But the changes made by independent firms are perceived as being their own decisions based in their complete understanding of how development should progress, which are in the best interests of the industry and counteract the conglomerates' interference. This has been a motor force in the

funeral industry in recent decades. But far from pushing the conglomerates out of the industry, the independent directors' animosity and their many local responses have encouraged a diversification of services as well as a honing of practices for both groups. The competition has also encouraged the independent directors to keep high standards and discouraged complacency. It seems that both groups see themselves as leading the industry forward. On the one hand, the independent directors feel they are protecting and preserving tradition whilst also merging these with progressive practices and state-of-the-art equipment. On the other hand, the conglomerate firms have done away with many outdated practices, with their eye on running and structuring firms in ways best suited to a national and multi-site operation (Cowling 2010: 146, 153). That the independent funeral directors did not acknowledge any potential benefits of competition with the conglomerate firms underscores that they think of them as unworthy outsiders, and there are also other significant silences in what they have and have not told me about.

Things which do not fit comfortably into the independent funeral directors' idealised image of the now-past are downplayed or glossed over. It seems as though the future is crumbling before them but, given their understandings of their group as persistent and omnipresent, they believe their firms have the ability to carry on anyway against the odds. As more independent firms are bought up or close shop, the remaining independent directors blame the conglomerates, downplay the likely possibility of potential demise, and vow never to let them win.

Surrounding the statements of persistence by the independent directors, there are some notable silences about the future of the funeral industry, and specifically the future of independent firms. Details of this were minimised, left out, or confined to the short-term in their comments to me. However, close reading of interview fieldnotes and transcripts shows several aspects of this silence are important and need to be discussed here.

First, despite the persistence of the firms where I interviewed, there has been an overall decline in the number of funerals performed by independent funeral firms. While independent funeral firms once arranged all British funerals, first the Co-operative's inclusion of funeral services and then later Dignity's arrival have removed a sizeable chunk of their previous market share, with the Co-operative

Funeralcare and Dignity Plc now arranging approximately 30% of funerals each year (McClellan 2016). While a 5.6% spike in death rates in England and Wales in 2015 (ONS 2016: 2) presently minimises the impact of this general trend (McClellan 2016; Burns 2015), the conglomerate firms are steadily growing in size and profitability. The Co-operative Funeralcare, which arranged 97,000 funerals and opened 25 branches⁵ in 2015 (The Co-operative Group 2015: 18), announced plans to open two hundred new branches over the next several years (The Co-operative Group 2015: 8). And Dignity arranged 73,500 funerals and acquired 36 new branches in 2015 (Dignity Plc 2015: 2-3). The steady growth of these two conglomerate firms means a steady decline for independent firms, given a finite number of funerals and limited possibilities for diversification.

Second, despite the opinions of independent funeral directors, funeral customers may not care if they know the funeral director, or that an independent firm arranges the funeral. Customers and funeral directors may not share the same values, nor care about the same things, particularly regarding an interest in quality at any price, and the importance of supporting local family businesses. Third, in contrast with the independent funeral directors' descriptions of the-customer-as-family, the particulars of 'family', 'the customer' and community are changing, and much about society has also changed along with this. In particular, their explanations of their customer bases suggested at times that newer customers are the descendants of former customers, but this presupposes a framework wherein generations of families live in the same area together, something increasingly less common. Fourth, the independent directors downplayed the extents to which their firms have changed, and instead emphasised the factors and traditions that have remained the same. Although the independent directors maintain that their firms are run in much the same way as they have been for generations, they have actually adapted in a variety of ways to the present market and its clientele. And as more independent firms continue to be sold, or go out of business, it is likely that the remaining independent firms will not remain so profitable for much longer. Also, largely speaking the future is not

⁵ The indicated annual report did not specify whether any of these new branches were acquired from previously independent firms.

necessarily going to play out in the way the independent directors stated that it will, that is, a future mirroring the traditions of the past and relying upon the continued prevalence and guidance of independent funeral directors.

There are also silences of a larger character to do with the effects of and connections with the economy, health and safety regulations, VAT and other taxes, the labour market, increased life expectancy and so forth. Among these silences are the things independent funeral directors certainly know about but did not mention.⁶ They did not speak about the potential effects of economic downturn and how this may have allowed their firms to employ more family members given a lack of alternative employment options. The effects or even the presence of increasing rules, business regulations and health inspections were not mentioned. Only H Melville & Sons recounted a recent visit from a health inspector, but described this just in terms of a time-wasting exercise by an incompetent person (Fieldnotes of Interview with H, C & A Melville 8.7.2014: 442-57). In general, questions about the role of increased regulation were met with claims that the interviewees ‘answer to no one’ and that their firms are overwhelmingly autonomous. Also, discussions pertaining to the intricacies of taxes and bookkeeping were reduced to ‘oh, so-and-so handles that’. Only Ted specifically commented on managing the firm’s finances, explaining that his wife deals with those matters: ‘I don’t have anything to do with that... She writes the cheques, I spend the money’ (Fieldnotes of Interview with T Orwell 30.6.2014: 206, 209). The important things for them, the topics they continually returned to in the interviews, pertained to the small-scale generalities and intricacies of the everyday, the real work of funeral directing, the mistakes made by the conglomerate firms, the traditions and rich history of the firm, and the changing qualities of funerals themselves. The general disregard of the directors for any overarching social, structural and economic influences that might affect the firm also

⁶ As I discussed in Chapter Two, I deliberately, and for good reason, allowed the shape and the topics of the unfolding discussion to be determined by the independent funeral directors I interviewed. Therefore, the silences are of their choice, and it is interesting that, although I largely interviewed individually, the silences travel across the group – these are shared silences. In other words, I let them speak and not speak as they wanted, and the not speaking was as shared as some of the topics of conversation – they silenced similar kinds of things.

throws light on how they explain and understand the bigger picture. For them, the bigger picture involves their firms being resistant to the passing of time and its large-scale shifts, and is instead constructed of the small-scale everyday things particular to them and their businesses, including unfair competition from the conglomerates.

viii. a bigger picture

The bigger picture according to the independent directors is, then, a selective and idealised one. It romanticises the independent funeral firms as persisting forever, it leaves out many major top-down influences, and it remains silent about developments that indicate a possible decline. However, it is of great significance because it informs and shapes key features of their work and worldview. For them, the bigger picture concerns a long tradition of undertaking families providing funeral services to local communities of families. This they see as persisting, with the necessary *habitus* and specialist practices being passed down through the generations; and it will continue in this way, although other things change around it. From their particular vantage point, the independent directors emphasised several main developments as contributing to the bigger picture of the industry and in effect constituting its civilising process as they see it.

First, funerals are becoming more celebratory, personalised and secular under the purview of independent funeral directors and their customers (Bailey and Walter 2016; Davies 2002; Schäfer 2007). This was explained as a consumer-driven development made possible by the all-accommodating character of the independent firms' bespoke goods and services (Walter 2005). The rise of personalised, celebratory and secular funerals also relates to a social shift in the perceived ontology of life as well as a growing disenchantment concerning death (Weber 2004); and although customers' interests and views are changing, the independent funeral firms find ways of adapting whilst also maintaining the traditional qualities of their firms.

Second, this bigger picture also sees the relationships between independent funeral directors, their customers and the dead as having been reorganised in terms of space and place (Augé 1997, 2002; Luz 2004), and this has manifested in a changed separation between living and dead and valorised liminality. Mediated and

reinforced by the funeral directors, this has been made possible by, as well as influencing and changing, social ideas about death and life. Death is no longer a central aspect in funeral arrangements, with the funeral directors focusing on particularities of the deceased's life as-individual in producing the end product of the funeral itself rather than fostering the death-acknowledgment processes of their customers. This reorganisation also acts to reorient customers around processes of arranging funerals and diminishes their centrality in it. The funeral has transformed from a rite of passage allowing mourner/customers to acknowledge death to an event reiterating life, with processes of recognising the death (in which the customer was central) going to the margins.

Third, the bigger picture positions 'the customer' as synonymous with 'the family', entailing that 'family' continues to conceptually adhere to traditional and conservative frameworks and that 'family' members handle the customer role in arranging funerals. This insistence on using traditional labels for accounts of contemporary funeral arrangements (which have changed over time) suggests the funeral directors are envisioning or implying forms of stasis which are not altogether present. While the funeral arrangement processes of past centuries involved more family members and home environments, continuing to position 'the customer' as synonymous with 'the family' implies that the arrangement framework has stayed the same in the major respects, and by implication that the family is still as central to the process. This also mirrors the independent funeral directors' insistence on firm traditions being preserved and observed, and suggests that the temporal order will progress in much the same way as it has done. It also mirrors the directors' insistence on their firms being 'about family' and composed of family-member employees, as well as their belief in the continuation of traditional frameworks in their daily work.

Fourth, the bigger picture includes the increasing, although downplayed, issues with the conglomerate firms' presence in the funeral industry. Their involvement is understood as being both illegitimate and confined to the present, with independent firms eventually prevailing. The conglomerate firms are seen as fundamentally misunderstanding that 'funerals are about family' in terms of family businesses arranging funerals for families of mourners. Given their understanding of funerals as family-centric, and also their thinking about the conglomerate firms as nameless and

faceless corporations, the independent funeral directors understand their success in the funeral industry to be a fluke.

On close examination, this adds up to a bigger picture according to the independent funeral directors that is composed of the day-to-day generalities which they are familiar with and see as central to their work. Given that they understand themselves to be guardians of the funeral industry, this bigger picture also acts to reinforce their views, their traditions, and their ability to predict and handle when and to what extent things will change. Ultimately, the bigger picture presents – as fact – the conviction that independent funeral firms will persist because they must, because there is no conceivable alternative, and in particular because that is the way the future is unfolding according to them. This is because in their view the future of the funeral industry will play out much like the past has, as guided and guarded by the independent funeral directors and their firms.

The independent funeral directors I interviewed explained their views around ‘this funeral’, ‘that coffin’ and so forth, with all of these small and specific instances conveying their concerns and helping indicate bigger things. In affixing to this formal sociological terminologies, it becomes clear that the independent funeral directors are producing and conveying a theoretically advanced interpretation of key things that are happening in society as they see it, and although they may approach this through interpreting the ‘small’, the everyday and the local, nonetheless it takes them into the ‘big’. Their interpretations of the bigger picture are that there has been an ontological shift toward increased funeral personalisation and secularisation. They also suggest a shift in social focus toward celebrating the life and away from addressing the death, and that this has implications for business practice, space and place, and interactions within the figurations involved. They give evidence for how funeral arrangements have changed over time, and how they have been affected by shifting social attitudes and practices surrounding death, as well as other changes at work in society. The funeral directors also have a strong sense of there being a specific temporal order, along which the funeral industry will develop, and this rests on their understanding of the small, everyday and local.

Discussion thus far is missing an emphasis on how the independent directors construct the bigger picture. Rather than highlighting larger-scale influences which

effect society as a whole, they focus on the small-scale and everyday things as if these make up the bigger picture on their own. This way of constructing and explaining the bigger picture is important because it reinforces the independent directors' view of their work as centrally important. It also underscores their belief in their group having authority in and over the funeral industry, with this authority derived from the different elements of the tradition fitted together along with other influences alluded to but unspecified. Fuelled by this vocational understanding of the independent directors as the guardians of the industry, they express the bigger picture as if coterminous with the everyday things happening around them. Consequently, they see themselves and the work they do as embodying the essence of the industry and as able to move it forward without forgoing the traditional practices most important to them.

The bigger picture according to independent funeral directors, the ways in which they go about constructing it, and the aspects they perceive to be most significant, are important in illuminating everything else they spoke about. In taking what they have said seriously, how does their bigger picture relate to, extend or contest ideas about disenchantment, ideas about space and place, and the ideas central to Eliasian theory?

III. The Bigger Picture by the Funeral Directors, and the Bigger Picture by Elias

So far I have discussed Elias's ideas about the bigger picture in terms of the theory of the de/civilising process, and I have discussed the independent funeral directors' depictions of the bigger picture and what this adds up to in terms of their views as a group. Where does this leave the discussion?

On the one hand, there are the independent funeral directors I interviewed. In conversation with me, they focused on the generalities and noteworthy specifics of their daily work. They also framed these in terms of an invoked but largely non-specific historical tradition to which they and their families belong. In addition, they seem to understand the bigger picture of change for their firms and their industry as composed by the daily activities with which they are most familiar. For them, all the things constituting their day-to-day add up to a developmental progression which

they see themselves as understanding and to some extent guiding. As individuals they have their own ideas about ontological shifts surrounding death and dying, trends toward disenchantment and reorganisations of space and place. They have their own local problems to address and their own understandings of change which differ from Elias's, because these are based in their knowledge of everyday happenings. But, as discussed, as a collective they have common understandings of right and wrong, how things are and how things should be.

On the other hand, there is Norbert Elias and his work. There is an assumption that Elias is working at or even beneath the level of the grounded theorist, given his emphasis on the role of context, his figurational approach and its uses in contemporary sociological research (Baur and Ernst 2011: 122-3; Hughes 2013: para 6; Bogner 1986: 388). There is also an assumption that Elias's work is centrally concerned with everyday life (Jacobsen 2009: 9), something Elias himself refutes as a misunderstanding of his approach (Elias 1978[2009]: 129). Although 'everyday' activities such as table manners and the like frequently appear in Elias's writing, Elias states that he studied how and in what ways these activities and behaviours developed in order to 'make clear a change in the civilising canon which is indissolubly bound up with other structural changes in society' (Elias 1978[2009]: 129). As such, the individual qualities, activities and behaviours of people in their everyday lives are not the direct focus of Elias's work. However, it does elucidate the connection between investigations of the structures of social life and investigations into social life as experienced by groups of people being interdependently related, and argues that the latter is no less indispensable (Elias 1978[2009]: 128). Given his long-term and retrospective approach, and also his interest in dispelling social scientists' perceived fixation with the *homo clausus*, Elias is foremost interested in people in terms of their group membership. His focus is on how groups develop, and what these developments indicate about large-scale structural changes in society over the long-term.

In short, for Elias, the 'I' is primarily important because it is a part of 'We', and the 'We' is primarily important in illuminating societal-level structural developments over the long-term. Even in his essay about Mozart (a person), Elias (1991[2010]) is concerned with him as a group member and as a member of a

society, with Mozart used as an anchor to a particular stage of social development that Elias wanted to situate within broader social processes (Mennell 1997b: 500; Eyerman 1995). Perhaps because of his view that individuals and their daily lives cannot be disarticulated from the societies they help to compose, and because he thinks people cannot clearly visualise themselves and their interactions with others in terms of the larger processual patterns they are part of (Elias 1983[2007]: 77, 1978[2009]: 129, 1969[2006]: 15-16), he concludes there is no great reason to focus on them. In Elias's view, individual people cannot inform on and have no mastery over the blind, uncontrollable, long-term, large-scale processes of social development, because the equivalent of a cog in a transcending and multi-generation machine (Elias and Scotson 1965[2008]: 77-9, 108). Therefore, Elias's analytical approach is grounded in the level of groups and extends 'upward' from there. Relatedly, Elias's concept of the figuration is a model for group behaviour. Although comprising individuals (as nodes) and the connections between people to form 'webs of chains of actions' (Elias 1939[2012]: 407), figuration is not concerned with individual people's actions and views within this. This is because Elias is concerned with change in the *longue durée*, and how this manifests in the interactions within and between groups at various points along the way.

Taking the standpoints and approaches of the independent funeral directors and Elias together, a key difference in their theoretical approaches becomes apparent. The former construct their views from a mass of personal-level everyday life and group-downwards experiences, while the latter takes a more removed and transcending group-upwards approach. Put simply, the differences between Elias's ideas and the ideas of the independent funeral directors are based in what information they rely upon in constructing their ideas, as well as the ways in which they interpret these materials to hand. This difference has become clear partly because of the way I have approached learning about independent funeral directors. Had Elias himself undertaken the same project, he most likely would have visited the British Library and called up many books and documents. He would have read all of these and branched out as he found connections with further topics. Elias seems never to have directly spoken with any people who were his subjects of inquiry, not all of whom were long dead. However, his use of books and documents fostered his

construction of overarching ideas rather than main events narratives. Conversely, research I undertook for this thesis involved direct conversation with the living representatives of a group. In bringing living, thinking, and interacting people into an Eliasian analysis, it has become clear that their accounts often do not neatly mesh with Elias's theoretical concepts. This is partly because of the comparatively small-scale and short-term focus of their concerns and of my research, and partly because people talking about their place in a business and in an industry will provide different kinds of information than will secondary or document-based accounts of the same matters.

Earlier discussion considered some researchers' ideas for using Elias, and in particular how they have used Eliasian concepts in research involving interviewing. I argued that, even though these researchers see themselves as using Elias's ideas, they were mostly applying them as-is and not evaluating or questioning their workability in specific contexts. Nevertheless, and as I have shown through my analyses in this and the previous chapters, there are ways of using Eliasian theory to explore the accounts provided by people but without involving the application of concepts as-is. I have also continued to demonstrate that the funeral directors' ideas are not a pale shadow of Elias, but have their own grounding and relevance. In the next and final chapter, I will consider what kind of approach in theoretical terms it is that the funeral directors are operating within, thus returning to my core concern with thinking about the theory/practice relationship.

Chapter Six

Thinking about Theory: Norbert Elias, the Independent Funeral Directors and Me

‘...these scientific, “rational” modes of thought prove themselves valid again and again in empirical research and in practical application to the technicalities of everyday life. They seem so unmistakeably the “right” modes of thought that it must seem to the individual that they were a gift from nature, in the form of “commonsense” or “reason”’ (Elias 1970[2012]: 40).

I. Introduction: The Bigger Picture Ideas

The process of researching and writing this thesis has involved cultivating a relationship with the work of a man I have never met but who nevertheless ‘lives’ and in a sense ‘speaks’ to me. I have endeavoured to do justice to his work and to continue his legacy. The independent funeral directors also endeavour to continue their inherited businesses and preserve the legacy of their ancestors, and take respectfully these ideas as they see them playing out contemporaneously.

Bringing things together, what has this thesis and its intellectual journey been about? Centrally speaking, it involves me establishing a dialogue between Norbert Elias and the independent funeral directors I interviewed, and by extension regarding funerals, death and their changing place in British society. Overall, the chapters of this thesis also build together to contribute ‘bigger picture’ ideas about how to use Eliasian theory and approach theoretical engagement through grounded research.

There are several overall contributions to do with my approach and use of Elias in the research process I want to start with. First, this thesis has prioritised context in recognising that how theoretical concepts play out will vary situationally. Second, it has provided a ‘fair play’ way of treating both Elias’s and the funeral directors’ key ideas. In doing so, the thesis overall contributes a detailed and contextualised empirical example of how to evaluate theorists and ideas on their own terms, by taking them at their word and engaging with what they say. I have not endeavoured to prove Elias correct or incorrect, but have instead pointed up the potential in conceptual re/thinking and contextual use. In using the Eliasian key concepts of figuration, sociogenesis, habitus and de/civilising in a present-day setting, and in examining how these work and play out in people’s accounts of the unfolding present, I have been a fair player. And in this I have also learned from the independent funeral directors by taking their ideas seriously rather than forcing them into Eliasian-shaped conceptual boxes.

In doing this, I have called Elias’s name and taken him on a journey with me. In thinking with his ideas throughout the process of research, I have drawn my distance from much of the work on Elias, which applies his concepts in an overly respectful way. It is not my aim to replicate this, and in every chapter of this thesis I have instead returned to his implicit advice of, ‘don’t apply, think!’. I have also continued to consider, in taking this advice to heart, and in talking to people about their lives, what the result is and how it should be responded to.

In exploring the funeral directors’ everyday work through their accounts of over-time change within and across their firms, each chapter has also worked through contextual uses of Elias’s ideas by the directors of some British independent funeral firms. Chapter Two argued that, although funeral arrangement processes are on one level of central focus for the funeral directors, these were explained as though interrupting their ‘real work’. The mourner/customer is seen as a kind of intrusion for the purpose of arranging a funeral. Arranging funerals is the dynamis for funeral firms, but while they claim to be ‘about funerals’, the funeral directors are centred around ensuring their firm’s ongoing persistence. With regard to sociogenesis, Chapter Three argued that the ‘actual’ over-time processes of change were not of central interest to the funeral directors, with the firm’s longevity being similarly

primary. Although recognising the interconnectedness between past and present, the funeral directors explained the important aspects as having persisted rather than gradually developed. Chapter Four found that habitus for the independent funeral directors hinges upon firm-based conceptions of tradition, although these are largely things invented in the present with vague ties to previous generations. While the independent firms are premised on tradition, the directors' versions of tradition are 'now'. They say 'it's all about the history, the tradition and lineage', but it is actually the now-problem of staying in business which drives this. Chapter Five explores the funeral directors' 'bigger picture' and concludes this is largely a static one emphasising the longevity and supposed permanence of their firms. They perceive and describe changes primarily in circumstances which present difficulties in their everyday work.

In using Eliasian ideas in this analysis of independent funeral firms, this foremost enables learning about collective 'bigger picture' ideas which point up trends of a de/civilising kind. Most clearly, in speaking with directors in the funeral firm figuration, issues regarding established-outsider relationships repeatedly arose. Elias argues that the relationship may change so much that the established group ceases to hold power, but does not acknowledge this or relinquish 'authority' because allowing their vision of 'how it all works' to see them still as in charge. One group thinks that the other group is by definition 'wrong', which is what the independents largely do regarding their conglomerate competitors. This provides a direct parallel with Elias's (1990a[2008]) use of established-outsiders ideas around events in Harper Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), where the established (white) men knew Tom (black) was 'guilty' by nature and by definition. Although reducible to individual prejudices, this was more fundamentally about groups and how they work. Likewise as seen by the independent funeral directors, the independents and the conglomerates are intertwined in the industry figuration, and their relationship is largely a struggle for commercial dominance. Perhaps the conglomerates take the view that independents are on their way to extinction, or perhaps that they are part of the same figuration and are engaging in the same struggle. Do Dignity and the Co-operative Funeralcare directors see themselves as struggling against the independent

firms? Are the conglomerates the established now, or are they still the outsiders?

This will be part of my next research, as I intend to extend this work in future.

I deliberately chose to focus on the independent funeral firms because there is so little work done on them, with just Parsons (1997, 1999, 2003a, 2003b, 2014, 2015), Howarth (1992, 1993, 1996, 1997) and Walter (1996, 2005, 2016a, 2016b) writing the key pieces to date. The independent directors portray and uphold a largely presentist idea of the past. Collectively speaking, the directors I interviewed all seem to consider persistence as centrally important, but with this about maintaining ‘tradition’ and increasing the volume of funerals per annum, rather than interactions with customers and the particularities of arranging funerals in themselves. In following the independent funeral firm’s figuration by way of the accounts of members, I have thus focused on its more-or-less stable aspects. However these are premised upon becoming involved and overlapping momentarily with other figurations comprised of mourner/customers. The customers are largely removed from the funeral directors’ accounts of what is important and the ‘real work’. And when the customers are removed, death goes, and what remains is the usual routine of people doing a job of work, and the gossip, the joking, the showing off, the backbiting, and the everyday and their theorising about these matters. In my next research, the customer will come more to the fore. But now I turn attention to what kind of theorising the funeral directors and Elias engage in.

II. Explaining the Differences: Everyday Theorising as Viewed by Elias, Garfinkel and Schutz

The theorising done by independent funeral directors differs from the theorising Elias engaged in, with the former connected with the sociological conception of everyday theorising, and the work of Harold Garfinkel and of Alfred Schutz particularly relevant to discussing it. Elias was very critical of the everyday sociologies and their investigations of everyday theorising, and he specifically mentions ‘ethnomethodologists’ (Elias 1978[2009]: 127-8). Garfinkel, the ‘father of ethnomethodology’ (Rawls 2003: 122), in turn took issue with some of the ideas that Schutz put forth about everyday theorising. Thus a minor reason to discuss Elias’s, Garfinkel’s and Schutz’s differing approaches to theorising is that Elias makes

claims about ethnomethodology, and that Garfinkel's work is grounded in Schutz's (Sharrock 2004: para 3), particularly regarding Schutz's idea that people co-construct the social world in order to make sense of it and organise their understandings. Another minor reason is that all three, albeit from differing perspectives, envision the macro as constructed by the micro. However, a stronger reason for discussing the three together here is that they are each concerned in some way with the everyday and their theorisations of it can help throw light on the everyday theorising discussed here. Given this, there is a good basis for me to consider the theoretical approach of the independent funeral directors in terms of their idea about the nature of theory and the different kinds of theorisations people engage in, and whether and to what extent the approaches of Elias, Garfinkel and Schutz help in this.

Elias criticises approaches to everyday life as vague, fashionable, lacking in empirical validity and of little use in examining prevailing sociological concerns (Elias 1978[2009]: 130-33). In particular, he references the 'unreflecting use of experiments' (Elias 1978[2009]: 132), which is a jab at Garfinkel's, in the 1970s notorious, breaching experiments. Elias also states that '...the representatives of a not insignificant group of sociological theorists of the everyday, including ethnomethodologists and phenomenologically-oriented sociologists, seem agreed, above all, in their common rejection of all theoretical and empirical sociological research...' (Elias 1978[2009]: 127). But why does Elias dismiss them in this way? The essay where Elias discusses this, "The Concept of Everyday Life" (1978[2009]), was published in German in the year he moved from the University of Leicester to the University of Bielefeld (Goodwin and Hughes 2011: 693-4), and at that time there were debates in the UK and more widely in sociology about the rise of the interactionist sociologies. Elias's dismissal was most likely because of his particular inclinations as a sociologist and that his work had been misinterpreted as being primarily about the everyday (Elias 1978[2009]: 129). These are possibilities and I do not want to address them in any depth, but the point is clear that Elias turned away from the 'everyday life' sociologies and their central concern with how people go about theorising and making sense by using their experiences in the world.

Elias considers personality structures to be bound to and indicative of a particular phase of social development, and he maintains that attention to the

development of personality structures can inform understanding of changes in social structures (Elias 1978[2009]: 130). Elias's most thorough discussion of the connections between personality structures and social structures is in his essay on the military elite in *Studies on the Germans* (1989a[2013]). But there are no 'actual people' in Elias's sociology, and he generally argues in the abstract that people's beliefs, behaviours and feelings develop interdependently in accordance with the habitus of the groups to which they belong. Elias thus brackets away the questions of what makes a social being and how exactly people go about constructing the social world. He similarly notes but excludes intersubjectivity and interiority. Although Elias does discuss ideas about personality structures, (psychological) drives and the We-I balance, and while Mozart, Louis XIV and some other named people are incorporated in his discussions, their manner of understanding and interpreting are not considered, but are instead abstractly regarded in terms of shifting power ratios, sociogenesis, and nameless and faceless figurations.

Powell describes both Garfinkel and Elias as 'relational sociologists' (Powell 2013: 187). Although there are issues with Powell's (2013) take on Garfinkel and his views of the relational, he is right to the extent that the two seem to agree concerning the relationship between individual and society. However, while Elias theorises on an abstract level and frames interacting individuals in terms of bigger picture trends in the long-term, Garfinkel's theorising is more specifically focused on how particular individuals construct the social order in present-day contexts, and what these interactions illuminate about concrete meaning and ongoing courses of action (vom Lehn 2013: 116, 138). Like Elias, Garfinkel is concerned with externality rather than the internalities of people. But a fundamental difference between his and Elias's approaches rests on Garfinkel's assumption that society is composed foundationally of people, rather than figurations. Garfinkel's core concerns also pertain to questions of here-and-now interactions between people rather than long-term trends. He is interested in questions of how social affairs are organised, particularly those which are generally relegated to 'somehow' type assumptions made by sociology about how society works (Garfinkel 1967: 10; Sharrock 2004: para 46). Garfinkel asks such questions as: in the external social world, how is it that people co-construct reality in their interactions with others? If person A performs a particular action, why

do persons B and C respond in a particular way (Garfinkel 1967, 1986, 1988, 1996)? Understandably, none of this appears in Elias's work. Because Garfinkel's approach, unlike Elias's, is grounded in people's actions, he brackets away different aspects. Foremost, Garfinkel's theorising is not concerned with signs and symbolic meaning (Garfinkel 1996: 8), nor interiority, and he rejects the Schutzian version of intersubjectivity, which he considered to be too concerned with the mental and internal. And this is because his work is focused on exteriority, observable experienced actions, and the practical question of how people do things.

Garfinkel's ideas are, however, still influenced by Schutz's work (Garfinkel 1967: 36n). Garfinkel is in agreement with Schutz that 'the aim [of social science] ... is to interpret the actions of individuals in the social world and the ways in which individuals give meaning to social phenomena' (Schutz 1967: 6). However, he challenges Schutz's quite sharp divide between 'scientific' theorising and 'everyday' theorising, and particularly Schutz's supposition that lofty scientific theories can be applied to explain and extend the comparatively rudimentary experiences and interactions of 'ordinary' people (Garfinkel 1967: 272-7). Garfinkel counters that '...the scientific rationalities [to which social scientists refer] are neither properties of nor sanctionable ideas of choices exercised within the affairs governed by the presuppositions of everyday life' (Garfinkel 1967: 277), and that this necessarily presents 'troubles' for researchers. These troubles are based in researchers' 'insistence on conceiving actions in accordance with scientific conceits instead of looking to the actual rationalities that persons' behaviors in fact exhibit in the course of managing their practical affairs' (Garfinkel 1967: 277). In other words, and to an extent similar to Elias's approach on this, Garfinkel argues that social scientists should stop applying pre-existing concepts and theories and instead watch and listen to the everyday and people going about their own 'research' concerns. Evidencing this stance, Garfinkel's breaching experiments demonstrated that applying scientific rationalities in studies of everyday life was disruptive, upsetting, and obscuring rather than illuminating (Garfinkel 1967: 282-3; Sharrock 2004: para 30).

Considering that Garfinkel's approach is concerned with delineating the specifics of how people interact and thereby construct social situations through concrete observable actions, it follows that he would adopt a broadly inductive

approach. Although Garfinkel's emphasis on researching observable interactions separates him from Schutz's more philosophically-minded approach, and despite how Schutz's attention is at times focused on the internalities and the mental theorisations and interpretations of ordinary people and of social scientists, Garfinkel's ethnomethodology is in part a transformation and adaptation of many Schutzian ideas (Sharrock 2004: para 3). Particularly this involves the focus on 'common sense' understandings, and the emphasis on the realm of daily life in positioning action as based in experience, and developing ways to access social reality from within society.

Schutz is concerned with accounting for people's moment-to-moment experiences. His theorising pertains to what makes a social being and what makes the social world, with particular attention to the interface between interiority and exteriority. He is relatedly interested in how intersubjectivity is produced, and argues that intersubjectivity is the only means by which the objective world is fully constituted (Schutz 1966: 26). Schutz's questions are: what in people's minds helps them to comprehend others?, and How do people recognise through typifications? How do internality and externality meet?, and How do people make the intersubjective meanings and 'facts' existing between them (Schutz 1967: 98-9)? As noted, in contrast with Garfinkel's approach, Schutz's ideas give attention to the internal processes at play in people's understandings of the social world. He seems to assume that every person, because having unique stocks of knowledge and their own sets of experiences, will do this in a way separate from others, in the sense of being cordoned within an ultimately solipsist internality (Schutz 1967: 99).

That a person cannot interpret the internal thinking of others in precisely the same ways that they themselves do makes sense. However, a more central point concerns how people interact with one another in terms of these internal processes, and their connection with the production of communal intersubjective meaning. Schutz argues the world is social, shared by people, and their understandings of what goes on in it is based in intersubjective interpretation (Schutz 1967: 218). On this point, Elias might add that people's stocks of knowledge and experiences are necessarily derived from a range of interpersonal interactions, the ways in which their personality structures are formed is founded in the interpersonal, and because

no one person can be disconnected in this way what goes on in their minds is of little consequence. And although having similar ideas about the social world and the interconnectedness of people, Garfinkel would argue here that intersubjective meaning is derived from observable-and-reportable interactions between people (Garfinkel 1967: 1). For Garfinkel, the idea of solipsism, or an absolute divide between people, is nonsense as people routinely dispel it. For all practical purposes, social life is premised upon the fact that there is no solipsism.

Based in their internal theorising about the external world, Schutz argues that people interpret what exists around them by structuring it in intersubjective 'common-sense' ways, conforming with their own life experiences and stockpile of typifications (Schutz 1962: 59, 1967: 205-6, 1953, 1996). He terms this 'constructs of the first degree', first level or 'first-order' theorising. The constructs and interpretations which social scientists use to interpret the first-order are constructs of constructs, or 'second-order' theorising (Schutz 1996: 143). Relatedly, third-order constructs are those designed and used to clarify the second-order. In short, Schutz maintains that every attempt to understand the social is necessarily a refinement of the first-order or the everyday interpretations of the people living in the social scene or setting of interest (Schutz 1967: 205-6, 1962: 59, 280). To interactionist sociologists, and to ethnomethodologists in particular, Schutz is wrong in making a stark distinction between professional and 'scientific' theorising (the second and third order) and everyday styles of theorising (the first order). However, with regard to theorising, Elias makes a de facto even sharper distinction between everyday theorising and the 'scientific' or otherwise 'professional' forms of theorising, in not giving any attention to how people go about considering and theorising the world. As a result Elias conveys that everyday theorising is unimportant, because people cannot comprehend the long-term trends they take part in. But in contrast he thinks that, by examining (accounts of) the everyday interactions between people over long periods, the social scientist can find insightful patterns. Garfinkel conversely argues that everyday theorising is based in the observable interactions between people, and should form the basis for sociological analysis, while Schutz suggests that everyday theorising takes place in the interface between the mind and social interaction, and is more simple than the kind of theorising done by social scientists.

What has all this to do with the funeral directors? So far I have been thinking across the approaches to everyday theorising, and noticing some overlaps and limitations. But how do the independent funeral directors make sense of the world, come to theorise it, and produce the bigger picture that they do? What is their approach to theorising? Previous chapters have discussed some key similarities and differences between their understandings and Elias's. The way I have approached these similarities and differences is by scrutinising the kind of theorising that people do in their everyday lives – here the funeral directors – as compared with the kind of theory that Elias produced. So, on the one hand, there are the independent funeral directors and their theorising based in the sociogenesis of daily life, and on the other Garfinkel's and Schutz's approaches to the everyday theorising people engage in and Elias and his ideas.

The independent funeral directors are first-order theorising, within a Schutzian understanding. In interview contexts, they explained their pre-interpreted observations of their social world, with these interpretations based on their experiences as people doing the everyday work of funeral directing. Schutz sees first-order theorising around his distinction between the 'practical theorist' and methods of 'scientific' theorising. His stance is that people theorising at this practical level do not also engage in 'higher' level forms of theorising (Schutz 1967: 206, 81), and that scientific theorising is a higher level extension of the practical. He assumes instead that the kind of theorising that people like the funeral directors do in their everyday lives is confined to the first-order, and to 'experiencing' on a comparatively rudimentary level. The hierarchic terms in which Schutz organises kinds of theorising marks a divide between his views and those of interactionist sociologists and ethnomethodologists. Garfinkel in particular takes issue with this, including as evidenced by ethnomethodology being about the everyday sense-making of first-order theorising: i.e. a methodology guided by the first-order and its manifestations in observable actions.

But is this right or helpful? Are the independent funeral directors really so unreflective that all they are doing is 'merely experiencing' and 'simply observing', as Schutz would have it (Schutz 1967: 140-41)? Certainly not! The previous chapters have made clear that the independent funeral directors have their own theories, ideas

and grounded examples concerning life and death, local problems, business strategy, the economy and the rest of it. In short, they provide far more than just ‘the material with which to begin [scientific analysis]’ (Schutz 1967: 140). In fact, it is clear that the independent funeral directors are theorists of the second-order, and sometimes the third, because attending to problems and issues that do not directly obstruct their personal daily actions (Sharrock 2004: para 26), and because having read widely about theories of death in philosophical, religious and sociological terms, to different degrees they interpret aspects of their daily lives through these lenses. While the Schutzian perspective would place funeral directors below social scientists, because the latter group has scientific rationalities at their disposal, Garfinkel would view this as an inaccurate conclusion. He further indicates that the sociological practice of applying theory onto everyday realities is unhelpful, and that ‘the scientific rationalities can be employed only as ineffective ideas in the actions governed by the presuppositions of everyday life. This is because the scientific rationalities are neither stable features nor sanctionable ideas of daily routines...’ (Garfinkel 1967: 283). In agreement with Garfinkel, the point is that the funeral directors, as practical theorists going about theorising the everyday in terms of their experiences, are not engaging in some lower level of thought than the social scientist. Instead, through accounts of their experience, they are in fact informing, questioning and pushing the contextual boundaries of their own rationalities.

In line with Garfinkel’s view, the independent funeral directors understand themselves as the experts. Conversations with them overall suggest that they perceive theoretical knowledge and authority as deriving from the work experiences and passed-down wisdom they possess. The directors also seem to consider people outwith this work tradition as being unable to grasp and theorise on the important aspects because these only become apparent through continued engagement in this grounded context. For them the contextual logic of right and wrong, how things ‘should’ be and what has changed are based in, predicated upon and interconnected with the everyday jobs they do and their over-time perceptions of change and stasis in these.

In contrast with how Schutz would view the theorising of the funeral directors, Elias’s approach would involve what Schutz terms third-order theorising in

interpreting the second-order data, as he did with Scotson's thesis and also data from the 'Adjustment of Young Workers to Work Situations and Adult Roles' project (for comments on these projects, see Goodwin and O'Connor 2009). But mostly he is an interpreter of the third-order. Schutz explains that the third-order 'is the level of abstractive separation leading to conceptual generalizations...conceptual thinking proper' (Schutz 1962: 280). And the materials Elias used to develop his concepts were, according to Schutz's framework, either interpretations of the first-order, or interpretations of interpretations of the first-order. This to me perhaps implies a fourth-order approach to theorising, by which I mean theorising done at a step further removed from the level of the everyday.

III. How We-I Have Been Theorising: Elias, the Independent Funeral Directors and Me

The approaches to theorising of Elias and of the independent funeral directors involve two key differences: their approaches, and the materials they use. Elias primarily used documents and texts to construct his ideas. However, the funeral directors use their 'stocks of knowledge' (Schutz 1962: 7) which are based on their own lives and experiences to construct their ideas. Their approaches also differ in terms of 'directionality'. Elias is concerned with the retrospective and long-term, while the independent funeral directors are concerned with the prospective and comparatively short-term. And the independent funeral directors as a group see themselves as the experts of their trade given their heritage and many years of experience, while Elias would probably argue that representatives of groups cannot fathom the processes they are contributing to (Elias 1969[2006]: 15-16), and that being an expert is based in having a holistic understanding of how social structures are developing over the *longue durée*. This derives from his focus on transcending over-time trends, rather than everyday life.

However, Elias may have been wrong. First, he dismisses a sociological engagement with everyday theorising without proper knowledge of this, because he is concerned with theorising of a different kind. Second, there is no sign that Elias grappled with the kinds of complexities raised by the everyday in his work, but which are built into Schutz's and Garfinkel's work as well as Goffman's – who Elias

praises as a ‘master of empirical detail-work among sociologists’ (Elias 1978[2009]: 128). There is nothing wrong with Elias’s approach given his aims as a theorist, although the fair play approach that I have adopted both builds on that and departs from it in talking to living funeral directors and placing the understandings derived from these interactions in dialogue with Eliasian ideas. I should stress here that I wanted to get at the figuration, not through proxies, but through the ways in which people, as members of a common figuration, invoke it and talk about it. I see the figuration as central and, rather than examining a ‘historical’ figuration via remaining documents, I wanted to focus on one as it is unfolding and developing. In other words, I wanted to take sociogenesis seriously. Therefore, my choice was to follow the figuration.

To arrive at some conclusions about the theorising done by the independent funeral directors, I want now to orient my research approach within the Schutzian hierarchy. In Schutzian terms, I have/not been second-order theorising about what independent funeral directors told me. That is to say, I have endeavoured to interpret what they told me about their work and their industry, but without applying external frameworks of sociological concepts onto their accounts. However, this is nevertheless an exercise in interpretation, which is necessarily based on my understanding rather than theirs. Garfinkel argues that, although field workers operate in settings they cannot presuppose knowledge of, they nevertheless assemble a body of knowledge about the given social structures: ‘Somehow, decisions of meaning, facts, method, and causal texture are made’ (Garfinkel 1967: 78). But regardless of the measures I have taken to see things in the ways that they do, I still cannot be one of them (Schutz 1967: 97-101, 106), and I am not a member of their group. Thus I am detached, not because I am a disinterested observer, but because I do not have the same lived experiences, nor do I share in the group membership, daily lives, troubles and goals of the people I interviewed (Schutz 1962: 26-7, 35). The point here is that there are differences between their choices, inclinations and stocks of knowledge, and mine. Returning briefly to Garfinkel’s above quotation, questions of the ‘somehow’ are an important thread in his work. Understanding that I cannot be part of the group or figuration in the same ways that independent funeral directors are, I have approached my research with the understanding that everything

that the interviewees told me is helpful. Within interview contexts, I did not prioritise certain types of information, and I encouraged the funeral directors to guide the interviews in terms of what they saw as being important. As such, the interview data I have placed in dialogue with Eliasian theory in four of my thesis chapters have been selected from a collection of data comprising topics of importance according to the interviewed funeral directors themselves.

Schutz (1967, 1962, 1996) explains different approaches to theorising in terms of levels, and this has been useful to the extent of orienting the independent funeral directors, Elias, and myself in terms of one another. However, Schutz's first-, second-, third- and fourth- order theorising presumes a hierarchy of knowledge and interpretation. Alternatively, thinking in terms of people's theorising as premised upon differing stocks of knowledge is perhaps more useful because it suggests differences rather than hierarchies between groups. The hierarchical view of approaches to theorising encourages categorical comparison in terms of complexity and supposed intellectual capacities, and for that matter Elias himself took issue with the social science practice of categorising findings (Elias 1970[2012]: 108-16). A more satisfactory position, for the purposes of this thesis and also in general, is that people have differing stocks of knowledge, different experiences, different daily lives, and thus differing approaches to theorising about the world we live in together.

In interviews with the funeral directors, and in subsequent analysis of interview data, I did not presume to know more about what they told me because of my scholarly background, and I did not presume that using Elias's theory would illuminate the realities of what they said. This thesis is an instance wherein we – that is to say the funeral directors, Elias and I – with our different stocks of knowledge have come together and used our differing approaches to theorising to create a new assemblage of ideas. Of Garfinkel, Sharrock notes that he 'maintains that scholarly faithfulness is not a priority... [and] it is appropriate to raid thinkers for ideas that might be useful to empirical inquiry' (Sharrock 2004: para 4). In a similar vein, my thesis has endeavoured to place Elias in dialogue with the independent funeral directors and me. And I have attempted this, not by applying Elias's ideas, and not by presenting his conceptual ideas as unquestionable and governing the funeral directors' level or my level, but by asking whether his ideas work and whether they

make sense in the chosen grounded context. I have come to the general conclusion that some do and some do not and this is, among other reasons, because Elias had a different stock of knowledge and a different approach to theorising from the funeral directors and I, and because the use of theory is always mediated by context and the materials used.

Regarding the funeral directors' accounts, the interviews and my subsequent analysis have illuminated the collective nature of their ideas and viewpoints. Thinking in these terms is not a homogenising exercise, but an acknowledgement of interpersonal interconnectivity and a recognition of nested figurations existing within my area of inquiry. Each funeral director is at once self-and-family, self-and-firm, self-and-other-independent-funeral-directors and self-and-industry. When the funeral directors explained things in terms of 'I', this was not an autonomous 'I' but the 'We-I'. The funeral directors generally talked as spokesmen for 'we', and in terms of being guardians together of the heritage and having some autonomy within it. The use of Eliasian concepts to explore the everyday realities and developments as seen by independent funeral directors has illuminated this in important ways, as discussed earlier.

This thesis has drawn on many of Elias's key ideas but is based in a We-I understanding of people in the research process as well as more broadly. Co-producing ideas and thinking with Elias and the funeral directors has pointed up the value in discarding homo clausus type views, and it has also provided an example of what can be gained from embracing and exploring situations where ideas do not neatly match up.

I have brought things together in the way Elias intimates is needed (Elias 1978[2009]: 128). While Elias's characterisation of the everyday sociologies is unreliable (Elias 1978[2009]: 128), he is nonetheless clear that, in order to understand large-scale processes of change, one must be mindful of the 'blind forces' as well as the everyday, and sociology should not separate them (Elias 1939[2012], 1970[2012]). My use of Elias's ideas in my interpretation of the funeral directors' comments has bridged the differences between Elias's theorising about how society is organised and how it changes in the long-term, and the independent funeral directors' theorising of what has been going on in their working lives. I have

endeavoured to use what the funeral directors told me about the realities of their work and industry to think about (my understanding of) Elias's conceptual ideas, and vice versa. In Chapter Two, I weighed approaches to thinking with Elias around his concept of figuration, including similarities and differences within and between firms. In Chapters Three and Four, discussion demonstrated the ways in which Elias's concepts of sociogenesis and habitus play out in particular contexts. In Chapter Five, my approach in reconciling Elias with the accounts of the independent funeral directors involved recognising the supremacy of context, and a focus on independent funeral directors' collective understandings in terms of the broad bigger picture overarching developments they see as happening. And I have oriented these perceived changes in terms of the larger-scale changes in society that they see as occurring.

I have answered Elias's call for sociologists to think for themselves and to use his work in appropriate ways, and I have done this in a fair play way. In chasing the figuration of independent funeral directors, I have learning about their work-lives and used ideas about these in dialogue with Elias's theories and ideas. The process I have engaged in of researching and of thinking with Elias has encouraged me to think critically but fairly about the 'actual processes' at play in the chosen context, and to build up fair and useful ways of using theory.

APPENDICES

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APPENDIX I

Explaining in-text references to Norbert Elias's work
using The Collected Works of Norbert Elias

Elias's Vols. of Previously Published Books				
Title	Vol.	Standard	New	Notes
<i>On the Process of Civilisation</i>	3	(2012/1939)	(1939[2012])	
<i>The Established & the Outsiders</i>	4	(2008/1965)	(1965[2008])	'Co-author' John Scotson
<i>The Court Society</i>	2	(2006/1969)	(1969[2006])	
<i>What is Sociology?</i>	5	(2012/1978)	(1970[2012])	
<i>The Loneliness of the Dying and Humana Conditio</i>	6	(2010/1985)	(1979[2010])	Reference refers to <i>The Loneliness of the Dying. Humana Conditio</i> (1985) not cited in this thesis
<i>Involvement & Detachment</i>	8	(2007/1983)	(1983[2007])	
<i>An Essay on Time</i>	9	(2007/1984)	(1984[2007])	
<i>Quest for Excitement</i>	7	(2008/1986)	(1986[2008])	Co-author Eric Dunning
<i>The Society of Individuals</i>	10	(2010a/1987)	(1987[2010])	Parts 1-3 written at different times, published together
<i>Studies on the Germans</i>	11	(2013/1989a)	(1989a[2013])	
<i>The Symbol Theory</i>	13	(2011/1989)	(1989[2011])	
<i>Interviews & Autobiographical Reflections</i>	17	(2013)	First edition	Interviews & materials from <i>Reflections on a Life</i> (1994)

Elias's Vols. of Essays				
Title	Vol.	Standard	New	Notes
<i>The Genesis of the Naval Profession</i>	-	(2007)	(2007a)	Most not published prior to 2007
<i>Early Writing</i>	1	(2006)	(2006)	First published 2002 Written 1914-1935
<i>Essays II</i>	15	(2008)	First edition	Written 1950-1989
<i>Essays I</i>	14	(2009a)	First edition	Written 1970-1985
<i>Essays III</i>	17	(2009b)	First edition	Written 1948-1987
<i>Mozart and Other Essays on Courtly Art</i>	12	(2010b/1987)	(2010)	Essays published between 1987-1998
<i>Supplements and Index</i>	18	(2014)	First edition	

<i>Early Writing (2006) referenced essays</i>			
Vol. 1			
Essay title	Pages	Standard	New
Idea and Individual: A Critical Investigation of the Concept of History	23-54	(2006)	(1922[2006])
Idea and Individual: A Contribution to the Philosophy of History	55-8	(2006)	(1924[2006])
The Kitsch Style and the Age of Kitsch	85-96	(2006)	(1935[2006])

<i>The Genesis of the Naval Profession (2007a) referenced essays</i>				
Essay title	Pages	Standard	New	Notes
Gentlemen and Tarpaulins	27-51	(2007/1950)	(1950[2007])	The only article published in intended tripartite series to appear in the <i>BJS</i>
Tensions and Conflicts	52-85	(2007b)	First edition	Year written: unsupplied
The Development of the Midshipman	86-91	(2007c)	First edition	Year written: unsupplied
Achieving Maritime Supremacy	92-112	(2007d)	First edition	Year written: unsupplied
On Institutions	121-3	(2007e)	First edition	Year written: unsupplied

<i>Mozart and Other Essays on Courtly Art (2010) referenced essays</i> Vol. 12			
Essay title	Pages	Standard	New
Mozart: The Sociology of a Genius	55-167	(2010b/1987)	(1991[2010])

<i>Interviews and Autobiographical reflections (2013) referenced essays</i> Vol. 17			
Interview or Essay title	Pages	Standard	New
Notes on a Lifetime	3-67	(2013/1984a)	(1984a[2013])
Norbert Elias's story of his life	71-140	(2013/1984b)	(1984b[2013])
A 'Jewish Portrait'	291-4	(2013/1989b)	(1989b[2013])

<i>Essays I (2009a) referenced essays</i> Vol. 14			
Essay title	Pages	Standard	New
Sociology of Knowledge: New Perspectives	3-41	(2009a/1971)	(1971[2009])
Theory of Science and History of Science: Comments on a Recent Discussion	85-102	(2009a/1972)	(1972[2009])
Dynamics of Consciousness within that of Societies	42-52	(2009a/1973)	(1973[2009])
On Nature	53-65	(2009a/1986)	(1986[2009])

<i>Essays II (2008) referenced essays</i> Vol. 15			
Essay title	Pages	Standard	New
Processes of State Formation and Nation Building	105-18	(2008/1970)	(1970[2008])
Towards a Theory of Communities	119-54	(2008/1974)	(1974[2008])
Civilisation	4-13	(2008/1986)	(1986a[2008])
Fear of Death	256-66	(2008/1990b)	(1986b[2008])
Technisation and Civilisation	57-92	(2008/1995)	(1995[2008])

<i>Essays III (2009b) referenced essays</i> Vol. 16			
Essay title	Pages	Standard	New
Pigeon racing	198-200	(2009b/late-1960s)	(late-1960s[2009])
The Story of the Shoelaces: A Sociologist on his Travels	135-7	(2009e)	(1967[2009])
African Art	201-8	(2009c)	(1970[2009])
Stages of African Art, Social and Visual	209-32	(2009d)	(1975[2009])
Towards a Theory of Social Processes	9-39	(2009b/1977)	(1977[2009])
The Concept of Everyday Life	127-34	(2009b/1978)	(1978[2009])
On the Sociogenesis of Sociology	43-69	(2009b/1984)	(1984[2009])
Figuration	1-3	(2009b/1986a)	(1986a[2009])
Social Processes	4-8	(2009b/1986b)	(1986b[2009])
The Retreat of Sociologists into the Present	106-26	(2009b/1987a)	(1987a[2009])
On Human Beings and their Emotions: A Process-Sociological Essay	141-58	(2009b/1987b)	(1987b[2009])
The Changing Balance of Power Between the Sexes – A Process-Sociological Study: The Example of the Ancient Roman State	240-65	(2009b/1987c)	(1987c[2009])

Miscellaneous essays referenced					
Essay title	Pages	In	Vol.	Standard	New
Postscript	493-527	<i>On the Process of Civilisation</i> (2012)	3	(2012/1939)	(1968[2012])
Towards a Theory of Established-Outsider Relations	1-36	<i>The Established & the Outsiders</i> (2008)	4	(2008/1976)	(1976[2008])
Further Aspects of Established-Outsider Relations: The Maycomb Model	209-31	<i>The Established & the Outsiders</i> (2008)	4	(2008/1990a)	(1990a[2008])
On the Notion That There Can be a State Without Structural Conflicts: Reflections on the National Socialist State	294-302	<i>The Court Society</i> (2006)	2	(2006/1967)	(1967[2006])

APPENDIX II

Accounts of Interviews

For first interviews, I chose not to arrive with set questions. I also chose not to record or make notes during first interviews for many reasons including that (1) I did not want to disturb the flow of information, and also (2) did not want to upset my interviewees. Many of the people I spoke with had no prior experience being interviewed, and thus my goal was to make each interview approximate a friendly and interesting conversation where possible (See also Chapter Two). On the occasions of second face-to-face interviews, I asked to record and interviewees did not appear to have any issue with this. I used the iPhone's built-in recording app, 'Voice Memos', and I think this was an unobtrusive option because we all seemed to forget it was there while talking. For second and third telephone interviews, I made notes and diagrams while we talked.

Immediately following each interview, I first quickly jotted down information as it came to mind. I wrote notes about what was discussed verbatim where possible. As I remembered new topics, I made notes indicating the approximate order in which they were discussed. I continued in this way until I believed I had made note of everything I could remember. In order to help me remember each person more clearly later on, I made notes about what they looked like, what they were wearing, posture and any hand gestures. I additionally made notes about locales I visited, the office buildings and their interiors (those visible to me), who was present in the office at the time of the interview, and other related thoughts I had or things I noticed. Upon arriving back at my computer soon after, I typed each transcript from my notes. Often, I found that I remembered further information in the process of transcribing. I also found that I would remember previously forgotten topics later that evening, week, or even months later. On these occasions, I quickly added to my typed transcript.

In typed and 'finished' form, interview transcripts comprise a 'full' account of each interview, presented in terms of a conversation. I first transcribed text in a written rendition of interviewee's manner of speaking in order to help me better remember the person's voice. Although I am not using transcribed data for Conversation Analysis, I knew remembering the speaker's voice would allow me to remember the most about the interview later on. I have since rewritten these in proper English.

List of Interviews and Personal Communications

Interviews

Personal Interview with Julian Doyle [England], UK (2 June 2014).
 Personal Interview with Alistair Stoker [England], UK (4 June 2014).
 Personal Interview with Sloan Shakespeare [England], UK (4 June 2014).
 Personal Interview with Carl Dickens [England], UK (6 June 2014).
 Personal Interview with George Stevenson [Scotland], UK (26 June 2014).
 Personal Interview with Ted Orwell [Scotland], UK (30 June 2014).
 Personal Interview with Alex Wilde [Scotland], UK (1 July 2014).
 Personal Interview with Horace, Clancy and Angie Melville [Scotland], UK (8 July 2014).
 Personal Interview with Jamie Kipling [Scotland], UK (11 July 2014).
 Personal Interview with Nolan Hardy [Scotland], UK (18 July 2014).
 Personal Interview with Tobias, Lily and Alan Stevenson [Scotland], UK (22 July 2014).
 Personal Interview with Alex Wilde [Scotland], UK (24 July 2014).
 Personal Interview with Julian Doyle [England], UK (2 September 2014).
 Personal Interview with Arthur Huxley [England], UK (4 September 2014).
 Telephone Interview with Arthur Huxley (9 September 2014).
 Telephone Interview with Arthur Huxley (16 October 2014).

Personal Communications

Personal Communication (email) with Carl Dickens (15 May 2014).
 Personal Communication (email) with Carl Dickens (16 May 2014).
 Personal Communication (telephone) with Horace Melville (30 June 2014).
 Personal Communication (email) with Carl Dickens (2 July 2014).
 Personal Communication (email) with Carl Dickens (4 July 2014).
 Personal Communication (email) with Sloan Shakespeare (15 July 2014).
 Personal Communication (email) with Carl Dickens (23 July 2014).
 Personal Communication (email) with Sloan Shakespeare (6 August 2014).
 Personal Communication (email) with Sloan Shakespeare (15 August 2014).
 Personal Communication (telephone) with [Co-op representative] (20 August 2014).
 Personal Communication (telephone) with George Stevenson (27 August 2014).
 Personal Communication (email) with Sloan Shakespeare (2 September 2014).
 Personal Communication (telephone) with [Dignity director] (25 September 2014).
 Personal Communication (email) with Sloan Shakespeare (6 October 2014).
 Personal Communication (email) with Carl Dickens (11 May 2016).

Name: Julian Doyle

Firm: Conan Doyle & Sons

Title: Managing director

About the firm: 5th generation family-owned independent firm, Est. 1881

Date of Interview: 4:30pm on 2 June 2014

Location: English city, Main branch office

Length of interview: 1 hour 30 minutes

Numbers of lines in the transcript: 403

Julian began by explaining that the history of the British funeral industry is a social history, and provided a detailed stage-by-stage account from the Heraldic period onward to present day. He has a Master's degree in Death Studies, so he and I have read a number of the same books.

He continued with an explanation of the main common assumptions people make about funeral customers, which are (1) that rich people spend more on funerals and (2) that there is someone grieving. He explained that these are both wrong in some cases and explained related variations. Regarding the former assumption, he has found that poorer customers in the firm's surrounding area spend far more on funerals, giving several anecdotes to this effect. Regarding the latter, he explained he had arranged funerals for customers who were either relieved at the death or not sad at all.

Next, Julian talked about his great grandparents and how the firm became the key local one by supporting the neighbourhood. He gave the example of his great grandmother buying shoes for children from poor families. He explained that the firm continues this tradition, with the example of him giving a local woman travel money to visit her daughter in a far-off hospital because she was struggling to pay for transport. Julian also gave several other examples of how his firm makes a great effort to stay involved in the local community.

This was followed by what has changed in terms of customer wants and interests. He explained that the firm has been getting far more 'special requests' lately and gave several anecdotes related to this. Although funerals stay the same more-or-less in terms of tradition, the city where Conan Doyle & Sons is based is continually changing, and Julian gave a lengthy account of the changing community makeup in the area and described various ways the firm has addressed this. For Julian, the firm must stay tied in with the local community or fail. He also described how the firm has expanded, adding new branches in different areas of England and in different countries to follow their long-term clients; and that it had also diversified, starting an exhumation business 'side project' to compensate for when they have fewer funerals.

Following this, we talked about customer satisfaction. Julian's firm thinks questionnaires are unhelpful because the client can just take up problems with them directly, and the firm will do everything they can to help. They try their best to address complaints however possible.

Julian then emphasised that family businesses are better than the newer conglomerates (Co-op, Dignity). He feels that Dignity only cares about bottom-line profits, and although the Co-op had admirable beginnings, they are like that now too. For him, family businesses like his care about quality and their customers more than anything else. He used the firm's fleet as an example: The firm buys only Jaguar hearses and limousines because they are 'the best'; and it does not matter if they are more expensive because quality service matters more. Julian thinks most people use the Co-operative Funeralcare because their parents did; and that people choose Dignity because the name 'sounds nice'.

We lastly talked about why it might be that enterprises with such good intentions eventually become profit-centric. For Julian, too many franchises make the people in charge lose sight of what is important. The main operations are centralised in some far-off place, and the people doing and buying the funerals become peripheral.

Name: Alistair Stoker

Firm: B Stoker & Son

Title: Managing director

About the firm: 7th generation family-owned independent firm, Est. 1780

Date of Interview: 11:00am on 4 June 2014

Location: English city, Main branch office

Length of Interview: 1 hour 30 minutes

Numbers of lines in the transcript: 350

Alistair began by giving a detailed history of his firm and its changes of location over its first hundred years. He then told me about how, following World War II, the firm was employed to exhume all the French soldiers buried in England and repatriate them to France. Some 2,000 French soldiers repatriated.

He then told me about himself, that he had studied law and worked as a solicitor for seven years before coming to work with his father at the firm.

Alistair explained that the firm has three branches now, and that he has hired women to run them. He continued that, through earlier wartime connections and the firm's proximity to a large Italian community, the firm does many Italian funerals, and this is why he is so familiar with the repatriation process. He briefly explained the timeline of events and issues shipping bodies back to Italy. Repatriation means that the body must be embalmed, and this lead to a discussion of firm-based embalming policies. Alistair pointed out that the Co-operative Funeralcare and Dignity both do mandatory embalming, and explained that it is an optional procedure at his firm. He suggested that maybe they embalm all bodies in case there is a long wait before the funeral occurs.

Alistair told several stories about when he was boy and assisting with the firm's removal of bodies. He described local operations of working with the police, the council and doctors, the timeline of events when he started working at the firm, and how things work now.

He then discussed how clients get in touch after a death. Alistair used to hear from a priest and then visit the home of the deceased, but now the families often call him directly. He noted that clients walk in occasionally, and some mention having found the firm on the internet. Alistair said that most clients are repeat customers, or choose his firm because their family has always used it, but that websites are becoming increasingly important. I asked him about his local contacts, and Alistair listed related people and firms he knows in the area. He also explained that there is the option of contract-hiring extra people and vehicles when the firm has many funerals in one day and needs more resources. He stated that his local contacts do not compete with one another, and that if there is any competition in the industry; this between the independents and the conglomerate firms.

Next we talked about how the firm's operations are currently organised, who handles what, and what sort of timeline is common. Alistair contrasted the way his firm is organised with Dignity and the Co-operative Funeralcare. He explained that both sell funerals just as they would sell cars. But, since his firm is so small in comparison, they can accommodate anyone and address problems at the last minute. He then brought several small typed lists from his office to show me how he organises his day.

The discussion ended by Alistair talking about an American television show about funeral directors, and his thoughts about how this had changed social perceptions of workers in his business.

Name: Sloan Shakespeare

Firm: W Shakespeare & Son

Title: Managing director

About the firm: 5th generation family-owned independent firm, Est. 1885

Date of Interview: 3:00pm on 4 June 2014

Location: Suburb of English city, Main branch office

Length of Interview: 1 hour 40 minutes

Numbers of lines in the transcript: 346

Sloan began by telling the story of how the firm started. His great-grandfather owned a woodyard near the office we were sitting in; he made an increasing number of coffins, and eventually became a full-time funeral director. In the late 1880s onward, their firm was the only 'special purpose' funeral firm in the area. Sloan continued that his great-grandparents (Warren and Bela) were very involved in the community and made a point of saying that he is sure Bela was the brains behind the firm's success, and the reason the firm still exists today. His grandparents (Nigel and Macy) took over and the firm expanded to having nine locations. They noticed that cars were quickly replacing horses, thought that no one undertaker could afford to buy a fleet outright, and proposed that area undertakers pool and share the new vehicles. However, this was declined and so Sloan's grandparents bought three vehicles, and eventually, according to Sloan, put the rest of the local undertakers out of business. We next talked about clients still wanting horse-drawn funerals.

Sloan explained that all but two local funeral directors had gone out of business, and that the firms help each other out from time to time when busy, but also pointed out that local firms mainly contract-hire extra people and cars.

He commented that his father (Ramsey) added several locations—they now have fifteen branches in total. He also explained that his firm was the among the first to offer embalming services. This is an optional service, but Sloan thinks it is a good idea if the clients want to have a viewing or are planning on a burial. We discussed percentages of burials versus cremations locally. He estimated they do more cremations than the national average (73% as of 2014), but that some people still do want burials. He continued by observing there are not many Muslims or Hindus in the area, but there are some Greek Orthodox people and the firm does some of their funerals.

Following this, Sloan compared his 'no-tricks' policy to the American funeral industry, particularly concerning his visit to a Louisiana funeral home. He was disgusted by the tricks his colleague there used to encourage customers to buy more expensive caskets and services.

Sloan told me that he had wanted to be a journalist when he was younger, but found he could make enough money working at the firm. He also grew to love the work quite quickly. He recalled working in the woodyard as a boy, and explained the hierarchy of tasks and how new employees can rise in the firm.

After this, discussion concerned the industry organisations that Sloan is involved in. He has preferences, but values the organisations the firm is a member of, and is very instrumental in promoting their growth. The interview ended with a discussion of how firm websites would probably be more important over the next fifteen to twenty years.

Name: Carl Dickens

Firm: C Dickens & Sons

Title: Managing director

About the firm: 5th generation family-owned independent firm, Est. 1906

Date of Interview: 3:00pm on 6 June

Location: English town, Main branch office

Length of Interview: 1 hour 30 minutes

Numbers of lines in the transcript: 122

Carl began by explaining how he had renovated the firm's premises, and that now the front door opens into a reception area, but before it opened onto a hallway. He also commented that in the past the funeral director would always visit the family home, but now families want to come into the office to make arrangements. Carl asked my opinion on the layout of the meeting room we sat in, and the placement of the coffee maker.

Next, Carl overviewed his part in developing the firm. He had been working as a consultant, having studied Management at university, which he explained is highly suited for running a business. Carl previously had little interest in working with his father (Peter), but recently decided it was important to continue the family legacy. In addition to remodelling the premises, he had recently launched a mobile app for the firm, a Twitter handle and a Facebook page; he showed me all of these on an iPad. He has also added a bereavement 'aftercare programme', which provides several free counselling sessions with an area counsellor he met at Church.

Following this, Carl outlined the firm's origins. His great-grandfather (Christopher) was a metalworker and stonemason and used to own a stone yard. They are currently the only firm in the area with their own fleet, and they lend cars out wherever possible. Also, the firm holds an annual raffle at a local school. Their fleet is now quite old, and he said Peter would have replaced them by now had he thought Carl was interested in taking over the business when he retired.

Carl claimed that a conglomerate firm calls his office every month, pretending to be various other companies and asking to buy the firm, which Carl finds annoying and underhanded.

After this we talked about his current Diploma of Funeral Directing (DipFD) course (the highest funeral directors' qualification). A tutor on his previous Diploma of Funeral Arranging (DipFA) course explained that, regarding children's funerals, parents often want to pay because it is something they can do. Although some funeral directors do not charge for children's funerals, Carl believes that funeral customers like to be involved in the arrangement process and that this is important to them.

Lastly, Carl commented about a new disposal process called 'resomation' and explained the process. We contrasted this with the past social reaction to cremation when it was new. He is interested in resomation because it is better for the environment, but thinks that customers will take a while to warm to this new method.

Name: George Stevenson

Firm: R L Stevenson & Son

Title: Managing director

About the firm: 4th generation family-owned independent firm, Est. 1930

Date of Interview: 10:30am on 26 June 2014

Location: Scottish city, Main branch office

Length of Interview: 45 minutes

Numbers of lines in the transcript: 295

George started by telling me about his grandfather (Clive), who was adopted by a maternal aunt (Winifred) and uncle (Gregor) after his parents died. George showed me Gregor's ledgers and explained that he did 'low end' funerals, by which he meant for those who had died in a 'poorhouse'. From the ledgers, George takes that Gregor was in business from around 1910, although he started doing too many funerals later, and was originally a cabinetmaker. Clive worked with Gregor for a while, and then delivered milk. At that time, people who were good with horses often did funerals and many other jobs, and, after a few years, Clive opened his own funeral firm.

George grew up in the building where we were sitting. The room we were in used to be the family's sitting room. There was a small office downstairs, and when the firm expanded, they bought an offsite facility used for body storage and preparation. Next we talked about George's family. He is the youngest of three brothers in the firm, and his parents (Tobias and Lily) are now semi-retired. He explained that whoever picks up the phone when a client calls handles that funeral from beginning to end. After-hours telephone calls go through to their homes, and if a client wants to see their deceased, then regardless of the time, a family member will facilitate this. He also noted that the clients choose when the funeral will take place, even if they have to contract-hire people or borrow vehicles from another firm. In contrast, George described the Co-operative Funeralcare as prone to producing problems—he has witnessed a Co-op funeral director arriving at the crematorium with the wrong body.

George explained about Conrad & Sons, nearby, and their own firm used to be friendly before it was sold to Dignity. Conrad's was the first 'special purpose' funeral home in the area. George discussed how there were formerly many independent firms in the area, but they have all since failed, become Co-op branches or been sold to Dignity. George's firm was friendly with other local independent firms, but they refused to continue this when each was sold to the Co-op or Dignity. He named several out-of-town independent firms they cooperate with.

Following this, discussion compared and contrasted how independent family firms and how the Co-operative Funeralcare and Dignity do funerals. George described the Co-operative Funeralcare and Dignity as treating funeral directing like a business, while his father (Tobias) had told him that 'if it starts being a business, you're doing it wrong'. Local people favour independent funeral directors over conglomerates, and the firm has been doing very good business over the past two decades since most other independents have been sold. For instance, his firm does around 550 funerals a year, and the Co-op does around 35. George recalled that when Conrad died several years ago, George's firm did his funeral. Conrad retired and sold his firm to Dignity, but he did not want them doing his funeral even though the branch still bore his name.

Name: Ted Orwell

Firm: G Orwell Funeral Services

Title: Managing director

About the firm: 3rd generation family-owned independent firm, Est. 1921

Date of Interview: 4:00pm on 30 June 2014

Location: Scottish village, Main branch office

Length of Interview: 2 hours

Numbers of lines in the transcript: 519

Ted and I started our conversation by discussing why I had chosen not to record it, which led him into explaining some ideas about memory in relation to his work. He then explained that his grandfather (Gilroy), founder of the firm, started in a relatively unusual way: not as a joiner or cabinetmaker, but because of his love of cars. Gilroy grew up in a stagehouse situated between two large cities, where his father was a stagemaster. He worked as a car mechanic for some years, then started a private ambulance business. Gilroy then bought an Austin hearse at auction in London. At that time, the area had only independent funeral firms and all the local funeral directors wanted to use his hearse, so he began renting it out and eventually opened his own firm in 1921. Ted's father (Jacob) later expanded the business, adding three new branches. Where we were meeting used to host workers' meetings, but the firm bought it and made it into their main office. Ted estimates that this location is one of the largest special purpose funeral firm in the area – they have refrigerated storage, a full garage and a headstone display room on-site. Ted explained that he refuses to help other local funeral directors, saying that if they need extra people or cars for funerals, they can rent them.

Ted continued that most other funeral firms are now part of Dignity or the Co-operative Funeralcare. He looks down on both, as he thinks they value profits over quality service. He named a few well-known independent firms that were sold, explaining that now firms do not normally last for more than two generations, because people would rather sell. About ten years ago, Dignity approached Ted's firm with an offer, and this caused a family fallout because they offered a good price if Ted were to stay on as managing director, and far less if he left. This angered his sister, who was their office administrator. Because she felt unvalued, she left the firm and has not spoken to Ted since. As a result, Ted's wife left her bank job to work at the firm, handling its finances after that. Since then, the firm has opened several more branches.

Ted started at the firm when he was seventeen, washing cars before moved 'up the ladder' to more complicated tasks. He said that working with his father Jacob was challenging at times, but proved worthwhile because he learned everything from him. He sees Jacob as having done a lot for the business.

Ted also explained that the vicar used to inform the firm of a death, but now they usually inform the vicar – if at all. Although funerals are becoming more diverse and personal, customers in Ted's area prefer more subdued funerals. Ted gave a detailed explanation of what running a 24-hour service is like; he can never go anywhere without his mobile, and he can never set a bad example in public. The conversation ended with a tour of the premises. He explained embalming, showed me the casket assembly area and the firm's fleet garage.

Name: Alex Wilde

Firm: O Wilde & Sons

Title: Managing director

About the firm: 5th generation family-owned independent firm, Est. 1888

Date of Interview: 4:00pm on 1 July 2014

Location: Scottish city, Main branch office

Length of Interview: 45 minutes

Numbers of lines in the transcript: 273

Alex started by saying that the funeral business is always changing, and that the firm's history is outlined in the online brochure. He pointed to several paintings and photographs hanging near where we were sitting, and began telling a more detailed story of the firm's origins. Alex's great great-grandfather (Oliver), a joiner, was traveling from 'the borders' to emigrate to [country specified]. He stopped in a city and stayed there, eventually opening a workshop. Later, Alex's grandfather (Dave) realised that their firm was making more coffins than anything else, so the firm became full-time undertakers by the mid-1960s. Alex explained that Dave died when Alex's father (David) was twenty, and David had to take over with little experience. Alex emphasised that David made it work, eventually expanding the firm drastically, with his father's vision being the reason the firm is so successful today.

Following this, Alex described the locality surrounding the firm's main branch as a community where everybody knew everybody, and the firm did their funerals. Although most of this community has now moved further out, the firm still receives funerals from families who have used them over past generations. He explained that the people still using his firm are those who specifically want an independent funeral director.

Alex next explained that the firm has noticed that families may often select the funeral firm closest to them, perhaps because they assume all funeral firms do the same thing. People do not often know the difference between firms, and Alex commented that his firm is often cheaper than the Co-operative Funeralcare.

Alex explained that the firm has had a website for a long time, but that they only recently began focusing on it. Current clients can use the internet, but the following generation will really change the way funerals are arranged, suggesting that most of the arrangement process will be done online. An increasing number of people come in saying they found the firm online. The firm also enables clients to pay for the funeral online. Alex continued that their computer technician had designed an interface allowing the funeral directors to view all the financial and details for funerals from any computer at home or work, and this has made his job easier. The firm also uses email 'for everything'.

Following this, Alex described the ways in which the firm distinguishes itself from others, including a signature colour, and distinctive fleet. He argued these factors make the firm more recognisable, and serve as advertisement when they are conducting funerals.

Lastly, Alex explained that he worked in the firm from childhood, doing jobs at all levels. He noted that new employees no longer rise through the ranks, and so do not know how to do all tasks involved for a funeral. However, the firm has broken down tasks involved into departments, and so this no longer matters.

Names: Horace, Angie and Clancy Melville

Firm: H Melville & Sons

Titles: They are the only three employees and do not use managerial titles

About the firm: 4th generation family-owned independent firm, Est. 1923

Date of Interview: 10:00am on 8 July 2014

Location: Scottish county town, office/family home

Length of Interview: 1 hour 45 minutes

Numbers of lines in the transcript: 584

The interview was initially with Horace and his adult son Clancy. Horace explained that his family were historically joiners. His grandfather (Hamilton) made coffins for poorhouse funerals using roofing timber. Eventually, Hamilton did more funerals and hired people to do most of the funerary tasks. Horace's father (Balfour), also a part-time funeral director, had twelve joiners working for him. Horace himself trained as a joiner and had been a building contractor until the housing market collapsed twenty-five years ago.

Next Horace described the importance of trust and honesty for their firm, which are an important part of the business. For example, Horace noted that the firm does not charge for mistakes and corrects them (where possible) without charge. He told anecdotes about mistakes in print obituaries, and how the hearse had broken down on the motorway en route to the crematorium.

Horace then talked about the firm's composition, with two locations and three employees (Horace, Clancy, and Angie). They chose not to hire anyone to run the other branch because one of them can easily drive over to meet customers. Horace explained how they renovated the new location.

Horace and Clancy explain that something that has changed is that many funeral directors no longer have trade qualifications, with Clancy having gone to university to study maths instead of pursuing a trade qualification like his father had. The two explained that the family (them and Angie who is Horace's wife, Clancy's mother, and fellow funeral director) lives upstairs on the second level, and weighed up the conveniences and problems with this. Clancy pointed out that clients could turn up late at night with clothes for the deceased, and one of the family has to get dressed and come downstairs. Horace continued that the family might be watching television or sleeping, but they provide a 24-hour service and that means always being on call.

Next, Horace and Clancy explained their outrage at the Co-operative Funeralcare and Dignity taking over family-owned firms and not changing the names of these. Horace hears people say they 'went to X & Sons because my family has always used them' but this is actually now a Co-op branch and they did not know. Clancy added that he is surprised none of the industry organisations have done anything to address this issue. However, the firm is not a member of any industry organisations, because the family feels they are too inward looking.

Horace told several anecdotes about independent funeral directors poaching each other's business, mainly by telling clients that another funeral director is not in business anymore so that they get the funeral. They also talked about how Scottish funerals are more subdued than those that might take place in London, although occasionally they will do a more 'showy' funeral.

Angie then joined the interview. She discussed their recent visit from the council health inspector, and the three discussed their website and what to do to develop it. Angie told several anecdotes about removals. They lastly explained that their firm offers two coffin choices, but is willing to order whatever the customer wants if s/he does not like either. Horace commented that fewer choices make for happier customers.

Name: Jamie Kipling

Firm: Kipling's Funerals

Title: Managing director and founder

About the firm: 1st generation family-owned independent firm, Est. 2004

Date of Interview: 10:30am on 11 July 2014

Location: Scottish city, Main branch office

Length of Interview: 2 hours

Numbers of lines in the transcript: 406

Jamie explained that he had started business by selling auto-parts from the garden shed at his parents' home at the age of sixteen, but this ended when online retailers emerged. Jamie had a friend at the firm of G G Byron, who wanted to start his own firm. Jamie had the money, and his friend had the experience, so they went into business together. The new firm did one funeral in the first year, and his friend disappeared. Both Jamie's parents came to work at the firm, and eventually it started to do better.

Analysing the funeral trade and its math, Jamie calculated that he could provide a less expensive service of the same quality. He explained that he was 'out to change the funeral industry'. His packages currently start at a comparatively inexpensive price thereby undercutting the local average price by a considerable margin. With the entry-level package, Jamie does not have to ask for deposit, which is good for clients who cannot pay it outright. As a result, the firm gets a lot of business sent from other firms who find their clients cannot pay the deposit. Jamie explained that his goal is to be the EasyJet equivalent in funeral service: low base price with many potential add-on services; a small profit margin per funeral, but more funerals by volume. He is able to give costumers whatever they want, while also accommodating clients with less means. Where possible, the firm performs some services for free because they believe community service is more important than short-term profits.

Next, Jamie explained his response to funeral industry organisations, commenting that the firm does not benefit from membership: the more they make, the more the organisations take from them, but without providing them anything in return. He also discussed ideas he has about using the internet in funeral arranging. He sees the website as a 'big draw', and that the firm has had many customers emailing from foreign countries to arrange funerals for loved ones who have died in Scotland, and he feels this will increase with time. Jamie continued that many younger people are starting to arrange funerals now, so web presence is important and that the firm has a full-time web developer. Their goal is to stay ahead where web-based advertisement and communication is concerned.

Jamie then talked about three new branches the firm plans to open in various locations around Scotland. It will not open several locations in the same area, like Dignity or the Co-operative Funeralcare, and he argued that people will travel to get a good price and a quality service. Jamie also explained that he is hesitant about hiring the new people needed, because he wants people who will become active members in the new locations, in the way his current employees are.

Lastly, Jamie explained that many clients say they assumed arranging a funeral would be a sad occasion, but there were positives. He continued that the firm's approach is to focus on the good; it is best to stay positive when faced with 'pretty awful stuff'.

Name: Nolan Hardy

Firm: Joyce & Hardy

Title: Chief managing officer

About the Firm: 2nd generation family-owned independent firm, Est. 1982

Date of Interview: 2:00pm on 18 July 2014

Location: Scottish city, Main 'hub' office

Length of Interview: 1 hour

Numbers of lines in the transcript: 374

Nolan began by explaining price as a main difference since the beginning of the funeral trade; funerals used to cost around £200, but are now around £3000. The firm uses a deposit scheme whereby the family must pay a deposit up-front, and then the rest at some later date. Many people have trouble coming up with the deposit money, and another problem exists where people leave savings for their funerals, but not enough because they had budgeted for how much funerals cost when they started saving. Nolan explained pre-payment plans, and the rate of appreciation on these.

Next, Nolan commented that customer choice has changed over time regarding coffins, urns, style of service and so on. He continued that arranging funerals used to be simpler, but has become more complicated given all the choices now available. As examples, Nolan told anecdotes about a coffin manufacturer who decorated a man's coffin with photos from his past holiday trips, and a funeral where the mourners were asked to come dressed as superheroes. Nolan argued that what has really changed is the customers' interests in personalised funerals, commenting that funerals are also becoming more public since the death of Princess Diana, and less religious; and that the timeline has increased because of matters to do with GPs.

Following this, Nolan explained that the rise of obesity has presented issues with funerals at his firm. Coffins and morgue storage compartments are sometimes not big enough to accommodate the deceased, and they sometimes have trouble returning or removing a deceased person from their home because the body is so heavy. Nowadays, the firm sends a member out to evaluate the house before they agree to bring the person home for the viewing.

Nolan's firm also does a lot of funerals following transportation-related 'disasters', and he explained the firm's involvement in the aftermath of several of these. Nolan then provided a detailed account of how the firm is organised in terms of branches and the division of tasks. The firm calculates in which areas death rates will probably peak in five to ten years, and sets up a branch there. The firm recently centralised all main operations in one building (main hub) centrally located between all branches, and that they have two people at each branch to field phone calls and walk-ins, who he referred to as an arranger and 'a woman'. The firm has around 38 employees, most of whom work at the main hub. Nolan also explained how the firm has a custom fleet of hearses and limousines, and a custom suit for directing funerals.

Lastly, technology in the workplace was discussed. Nolan noted that the firm has updated its systems at various points, and they now have an internal email system and have hired web developers. He explained that the firm arranges a fair number of funerals online, and that a good number of customers say they found the firm online, but they still advertise in the phonebook and use a corkboard to organise daily tasks.

Names: Lily, Alan and Tobias Stevenson

Firm: R L Stevenson & Son

Titles: Alan is a managing director at R L Stevenson & Son, and his parents Tobias and Lily are semi-retired managing directors

About the firm: 4th generation family-owned independent firm, Est. 1930

Date of Interview: 2:30pm on 22 July 2014

Location: Scottish city, Main branch office

Length of Interview: 2 hours 30 minutes; voice recorded

Numbers of lines in the transcript: 1615

Much of the interview was devoted to explaining the firm's history over the previous three generations. Lily detailed its history, consulting a large pack of notes she had brought. Lily is the direct descendent of the firm's founder, and her husband Tobias married into the business. They have three sons in the business (Alan, and George who I talked with during my last visit, are two). Lily and Tobias commented that the firm used to run a taxi company, a mini-bus service which drove children to school, and also, in the 1980s, they arranged weddings. Tobias explained that, when there were not many funerals to arrange, these other businesses kept them afloat.

Alan, Tobias and Lily then detailed the home-life of a funeral directing family, and related many anecdotes about growing up in a funeral firm, problems arranging holiday meals, and the true meaning of running a 24-hour service. Alan and Lily told of their experiences of seeing their first corpse. Alan explained that, growing up in a funeral firm, the work does not bother him in the way his friends think it should. Lily continued that 'normal' is different for their family: she recalled how the family would fall into conversations about the day's work and only notice when visitors were shocked. The three reiterated that funerals are their life and death and funerals are 'normal conversation' to them.

Next, Alan, Lily and Tobias explained some of the things that have changed over the years the firm has been in business. Alan discussed how the level of service received from doctors, ministers, and crematorium and cemetery workers has changed—in his view had gone downhill. Earlier, the firm could call any of these people at any time and so the arrangement process was quicker, but that now they could only contact them during work hours. Tobias added that the firm still does its best to provide the same quality service despite the other parties not pulling their weight.

Alan commented that people used to wait longer before arranging to have a body removed from the house, but Lily and Tobias countered this by saying that was not always the case when they were younger, with Lily recalled Tobias had done removals at 3am. However, Tobias and Lily later conceded that people generally want the dead out of their houses more quickly than in the past.

Alan explained that the firm is doing more funerals per year recently, and sees this as connected with local residents preferring independent family funeral directors over 'the multiples' (Dignity and the Co-op). When Alan started work at the firm in 1985, the firm did 80 or so funerals per year, but that now they do somewhere between 500 and 550 annually, which they estimate is about 80% of all deaths locally. The three concluded that they give a good service, and that is why people keep coming back to have their funerals with the firm.

Name: Alex Wilde

Firm: O Wilde & Sons

Title: Managing director

About the firm: 5th generation family-owned independent firm, Est. 1888

Date of Interview: 4:45pm on 24 July 2014

Location: Scottish city, Main branch office

Length of Interview: 1 hour 20 minutes; voice recorded

Numbers of lines in the transcript: 579

The second meeting focused on edited the map of firm networks over time. A large copy taped to the floor and we crouched over the map, amending dates and adding names. First, Alex filled in and amended the names and dates of involvement for the previous four generations of people in his family, noting also who was not involved in the firm. Then, Alex explained which local firms his own was friendly with, noting which people in the different generations would have been in contact with each. He also added some names I had not come across in my research.

In his grandfather Dave's day, Alex explained that the firm only had three employees: Dave, David and a receptionist. When his father David took over in 1975, he expanded the firm drastically and they now employ around 75 people across the branches: the firm has branches under the name of O Wilde & Sons, but has also bought several independent firms and retained the original names of those. He then detailed which funeral firms and other companies the firm had taken over, noting the years of acquisition.

Alex reviewed which family members were currently in the business, and how each was related to him. He also indicated which family members are direct descendants of his great great-grandfather Oliver—a total of six great great-grandchildren currently work at the firm. He then explained the 'main events' in the firm's history, adding many more and amending some dates to those I knew about. Alex told me about the purchase of the firm's first hearse, a used model purchased in the 1970s for £950, while now a hearse costs around £125,000. We talked about the firm's decision to change the colour of their fleet in the early 2000s, and that several other British firms have done this.

Alex also discussed his father's very recent retirement and its importance because it underscores how much the firm has developed, and so quickly. He reiterated his pride in his father and his vision.

Name: Julian Doyle

Firm: Conan Doyle & Sons

Title: Managing director

About the firm: 5th generation family-owned independent firm, Est. 1881

Date of Interview: 9:30am on 2 September 2014

Location: English city, Main branch office

Length of interview: 1 hour

Numbers of lines in the transcript: 116

My second meeting with Julian was very different, as moments before I arrived, he had received word that his friend's son had committed suicide. He wanted to talk about that for a while, and it developed into sad but interesting comments about how best to raise children and how the world is much harder for children these days.

He then switched topics quite abruptly and started talking about the firm map I had brought him a copy of. He had not had time to study it, but, looking at it as we spoke, he began making changes, talking as he did so. He first noted that the map is something every funeral firm should have on file, but nobody wants to devote the time to do the research. In cross-checking dates, he pointed out a project the firm had since scrapped out of necessity, and this led to the topic of the Muslim community now living in the area. Many Muslim people moved into the neighbourhood, but did not want to have their funerals executed by Julian's non-Muslim firm. As such, Conan Doyle & Sons had to focus on keeping the firm viable by making inroads with local Muslims from then on. Julian explained the things the firm has done to acquire their business, many of which were successful. He also provided several anecdotes about these, and talked about some of the people he had hired in order to have more of a chance integrating with this community.

Julian asked about what I had been doing since our last meeting. I explained my interest in learning more about the structural development of the industry and, among other things said in reply, he explained that he knew someone who could provide a wealth of information about these matters. Julian then called this man (Arthur), who agreed to meet me two days later.

Julian's relationship with Arthur was long-standing. As a young man Arthur worked at H G Wells & Son (now defunct), and Julian would help with funerals there as a boy or Arthur would come to help at Julian's firm. He explained that Arthur is like a mentor to him and that they have been friends for most of Julian's life, and he overviewed Arthur's career in the funeral industry.

Julian also talked about one of the women he hired to work at the new branch he opened in the predominantly-Muslim area near his firm, asked about my own religious background, and was excited to know that I am Bulgarian because Bulgarians are starting to move into the area.

Name: Arthur Huxley

Title: Society for Allied Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF) Inspector

Date of Interview: 11:30am on 4 September 2014

Location: English city, Conan Doyle & Sons' main branch office (see pp. 277-8)

Length of Interview: 2 hours 30 minutes

Numbers of lines in the transcript: 323

Although Arthur's father was not involved in the funeral trade, Arthur commented that the work became his life, and that is all he has ever wanted to do. He worked at H G Wells & Son, which was bought by Ingall Industries, and this is how he became involved in the planning of what is now Dignity Plc. Dignity founder, Howard Hodgson, bought Ingall's, and Arthur came to know him in the late 1980s. Hodgson, Arthur and several other key players set to work deciding which branches to buy.

Arthur explained that Hodgson had a vision to give funeral premises 'a lift', and when he bought a new firm, he would renovate the backrooms and fit them with new equipment, believing that the standards of quality and service should be higher over-all.

In deciding which new firms to buy, Arthur explained that there were many local factors to consider, including changing cultural makeup. Regarding this latter, Arthur made reference to the issues around Julian's firm and the Muslim community. Arthur made a point of saying that the way Dignity buys new firms now bears no likeness to how they did so at the beginning, and now simply pick areas where they do not already have representation.

Arthur then presented the Co-operative Funeralcare as organised in the same way as Dignity is now: a head office somewhere, hubs, and branches surrounding the hubs. He conceded that it made sense to organise things in this way when Dignity started, but it now has the problem of people in the head office never having been near a funeral, and not knowing how to make the appropriate choices. Arthur also said that the Co-operative Funeralcare has become far too bureaucratic, arguing that the main difference between the Co-op, Dignity and the independent firms is that everyone is constantly working in the independents. In contrast, Arthur proposed that the Co-op, nowadays, has three people in charge of writing different parts of one document at any given time. He told several anecdotes about former colleagues in the Co-op's head office, and said he quit working for the Co-op after being disgusted by the lack of knowledge shown during a business meeting. Arthur explained that they spent 45 minutes discussing whether to raise their coffin prices and about bottom-line profits. He continued that there are too many price- and profit-focused people pushing papers, and neglecting what really matters about funerals: the quality service and the clients. Immediately after quitting, Arthur was hired by the Society for Allied Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF).

Arthur then discussed the Service Corporation International (SCI) buyout, and that the 'SCI guy' had planned to 'come in and bulldoze', as he had done in America and Australia. He withdrew because the British funeral market is difficult to penetrate because of tradition, which outsiders do not have. Arthur also discussed Plantsbrook successfully buying Dignity and its results.

Lastly, Arthur explained that being a funeral director means not 'living for today', and that in smaller businesses funeral directors have more leeway to help their clients and the community and get to know them. In the long term, Arthur explained, profits will come, but the good funeral director does not focus on this in a short-term way.

Name: Arthur Huxley

Title: Society for Allied Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF) Inspector

Date of Interview: 2:00pm on 9 September 2014

Location: Telephone

Length of Interview: 45 minutes

Numbers of lines in the transcript: 100

In the second interview, this time by telephone, Arthur explained in more detail the main organisations and people who were involved in the development of Dignity:

Howard Hodgson grew up working in his family's firm, Hodgson & Son (est 1850). First Hodgson's firm was first called Hodgson Holdings LLC in 1986, and then he bought Ingall Industries from House of Fraser that year. Ingall Industries had previously bought H G Wells & Son, which is how Arthur became involved. Hodgson then purchased J. H. Kenyon in 1989, which was part owned by the French conglomerate, Pompes Funèbres Générales (PFG). Arthur recalled that J. H. Kenyon was Hodgson's 'crown jewel', because at that time they did the Royal funerals. The firm name became 'PFG Hodgson Kenyon International (PHKI)'. Arthur explained they were glad when 'the French' eventually pulled out. In 1994, PHKI merged with Service Corporation International (SCI), which had recently bought Plantsbrook and Great Southern Group. That same year, PHKI became known as Dignity. In 2002, Dignity managers bought the firm back from SCI and went public in 2004.

Name: Arthur Huxley

Title: Society for Allied Independent Funeral Directors (SAIF) Inspector

Date of Interview: 3:30pm on 16 October 2014

Location: Telephone

Length of Interview: 1 hour

Numbers of lines in the transcript: 154

This telephone interview focused on one topic in particular. Arthur had previously mentioned a funeral director ('Kelley') who several funeral industry organisations, the BBC and the police were looking for. He had described Kelley as a 'fugitive of the funeral industry', having stolen hundreds of thousands of pounds from clients via his fake private ambulance company. Kelley would remove the body, take money for the funeral saying he would pay the funeral director when he dropped off the body; he dropped off the body but pocketed the money. Initially prosecuted and imprisoned for a brief time, Kelley was released and immediately began doing the same thing under various pseudonyms, in different areas of England. I had previously offered to follow up on this, and the telephone interview focused on what I had found. I had found information that may point up Kelley's recent whereabouts, and Arthur explained he would bring this information to the next 'board meeting' but did not specify which. Following this, Arthur said he would get in touch with a contact at Dignity corporate, to try to arrange a meeting.

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